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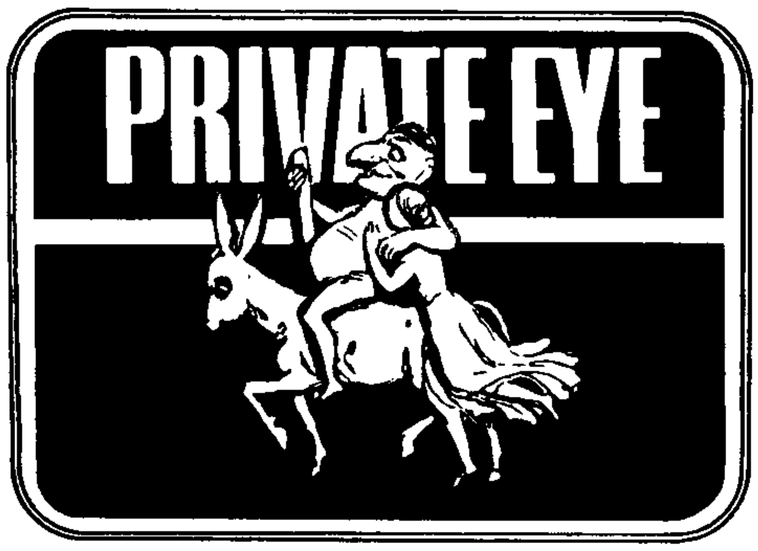
PRIVATE EYE

FAREWELL TOUR

★ BUSH FLIES IN ★

LAGER



Rebels with a cause

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TO continued protests from Tesco that it is not a tax avoider, the *Eye* has discovered yet another of the company's convoluted offshore set-ups designed to, er, avoid millions of pounds in corporation tax.

Sadly for Tesco the latest scheme, which involves Luxembourg companies forming English partnerships to earn interest tax-free, was outlawed in the last budget. And with very unhelpful timing for a company that is suing the *Guardian* over (mistaken) allegations of extensive corporation tax avoidance, the part of the finance bill closing the loophole was debated in parliament just last week. Introducing the changes, Treasury minister Jane Kennedy condemned such "highly artificial tax avoidance schemes".

The new revelations could prove particularly difficult for Lucy Neville-Rolfe, the corporate and legal affairs director at Tesco behind the libel action against the *Guardian*. As company secretary for the Luxembourg companies at the heart of the latest scheme, she would have been fully aware that they were only created in order to dodge corporation tax.

When the *Guardian* put the last *Eye's* revelations of tax avoidance to Tesco, the grocer responded that it "pays a disproportionately high amount of tax in the UK". Really? A quick look at the company's accounts shows that it pays significantly *below* the standard 30 percent rate, through a combination of legitimate tax allowances and tax avoidance. Confronted with this, a spokesman told the *Eye* that Tesco's bills were disproportionate because, while it is only 14th largest company in the FTSE 100, its UK tax bills are in the top 10. (All this proves is that Tesco does a greater proportion of its business in Britain than other major multinationals do.)

What's more, bleated the firm with all the logic of a company losing any grip it might have had on the subject, "we do resent the attempts by your publication and the *Guardian* to portray Tesco as a tax avoider when we pay more tax than most other companies. Tesco welcomes sensible debate about the UK tax system… but this cannot take place when leading companies and big taxpayers are automatically put in the dock for trying to discharge their duty to shareholders". Diddums!

● *Tesco's European tax tour, p 27*

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ABC

"You get a full tank of petrol and we'll throw in the car"

AS THE United Nations held its emergency world food summit in Rome last week, details emerged of the contribution made by Britain's overseas development fund, CDC, to agriculture in the developing world.

After several months, the fund has handed over accounts for one of its companies, the Zambian Mpongwe Development Company (it refuses to release most of them as "commercially confidential"). For decades under CDC management, Mpongwe produced vast amounts of wheat, maize, soya beans and coffee, largely for domestic consumption, and was highly regarded in Zambia for the investment it put in. But when CDC's privatised fund management arm Actis was created in 2004 and handed management of Mpongwe, with Actis bosses highly "incentivised" to grow cash rather than crops, the complaints began to emerge.

Actis brought in new managers who, one campaigner alleged, were "more concerned in taking expensive holidays, building new mansions, erecting electric fences round their houses, buying expensive cars and giving themselves and friends expensive contracts".

The latest Mpongwe accounts, for 2006, show this was all with a view to off-loading the business as it didn't make enough cash. Two major farms had already been sold off "as part of shareholders [ie CDC's] divesture plan under which the company will cease operations in December 2007".

Explaining the strategy to flog agricultural businesses as it took shape eight years ago, the then CDC chairman Lord Cairns claimed "CDC is now moving to a position to play a different, but more focused role appropriate to today's world." Though it's clearly time for a major rethink, there seems little chance. Speaking in a parliamentary debate to celebrate CDC's 60th anniversary last month, development minister Gareth Thomas confided that "we are looking at tightening up its investment policy still further". But don't expect a sudden return to CDC's development roots.

● *ACTIS and the false profits, p 27*

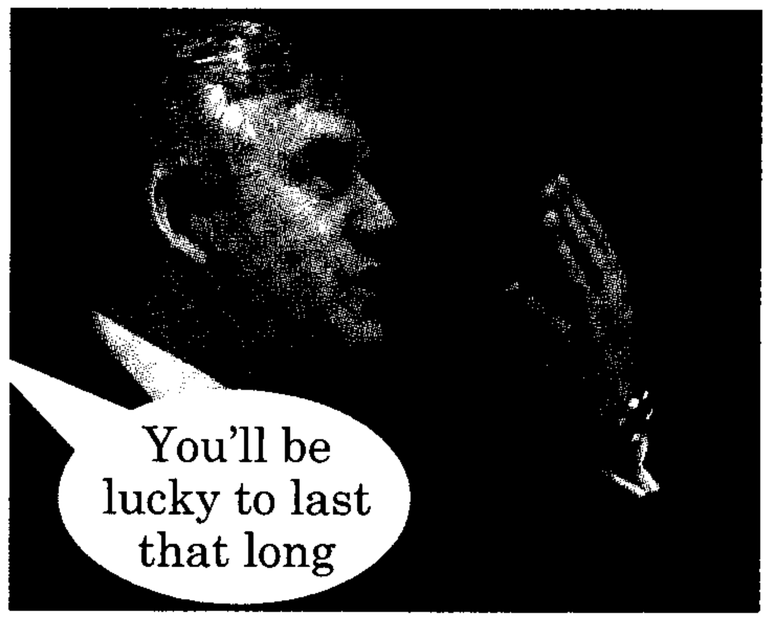
SHOULD the government have given Bradford & Bingley group finance director Chris Willford a job running the "Personal Accounts Delivery Authority" (PADA)?

That was the question asked in the last *Eye* when we wondered if Willford was really the right man to secure our collective futures by running Gordon Brown's new pensions scheme given that his bank had lost so much money due to exotic "financial instruments".

Since then B&B has been plunged into crisis thanks to its dodgy "self-certified" mortgages and bad debts, and a government bail-out and swift exit for Mr Willford are distinct possibilities. Turns out Willford is not only the wrong man to run government pensions, but he was also the wrong man to run the Bradford & Bungley...

● *B&B, the full debacle: Slicker p 29*

42 DAYS



NOT too many tears will be shed in the NHS over the sacking of Fujitsu from the disastrous National Programme for IT. The firm had only installed software systems in 9 of the 41 acute hospitals that it should have done and those repeatedly failed.

Not even the government agency responsible for the programme, Connecting for Health, would put up with such pisspoor performance and for ten months had been negotiating a "re-set" of the contract originally signed by the equally unlamented former head of CfH, Richard Granger.

But why did the talks only collapse, and Fujitsu have its contract terminated amid a barrage of negative publicity, on 28 May? Could it be related to the announcement from the Identity and Passport Service on 23 May that Fujitsu was one of five IT companies to be given contracts worth up to £500m for the IT behind identity cards, passports and finger-printing at borders?

PS: Fujitsu is in fine company on the ID card scheme. Also signed up by the IPS was US firm CSC, whose record on the NHS IT programme barely beats Fujitsu's and, er, EDS (*Eyes passim ad nauseam*).

● *More Medicine balls, p 8*

"Can Johnny come out to another funeral?"

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"If you look at the figures for the last 10 years the number of knife victims has remained relatively stable – although there have been spikes – at 200 to 220 a year."
– Richard Garside, Director of the Centre of Crime and Justice Studies, Kings College London.

Street of Shame

"A VOW to curb teenage drinkers was exposed as a sham yesterday with figures showing kids go unpunished," declared the *Mirror* last Saturday. "In the past three years, only 34 children have been prosecuted for buying booze. And just seven landlords got the top £1,000 fine for selling booze to underage drinkers."

Curiously, the paper overlooked another glaring example of the law going easy on an adult who supplied booze to children. Just one day previously, a 28-year-old journalist from the South West News Service agency had accepted a caution from Avon and Somerset Police for giving cider and alcopops to a group of 16-year-olds in Bristol, so they could pose for a series of photographs intended to illustrate an article on underage drinking for… the *Mirror*!

The hapless hack told the youngsters they were welcome to keep the booze when the shoot was finished – and several went on to be involved later that night in what police describe as "a serious disorder incident" which resulted in a teenager being left in a coma for several weeks.

ADOPTING its highest moral tone, the *Daily Mail* reported last Wednesday that Asda and Tesco "were attacked yesterday for the 'immoral' tactic of selling alcohol below cost price". A committee of MPs had been appalled to learn that youngsters were "pre-loading" on dirt-cheap supermarket booze before heading to pubs and town centres to cause trouble. "The revelation adds to the pressure on the government to ban loss leaders," the *Mail* noted.

Paul Dacre might approve of a ban, but what of his advertising department? Two days later, with a fine disregard for the dangers of "pre-loading" young drinkers, the *Mail* carried an ad from Asda – promoting two crates of beer for £16 or three for a giveaway £20. Treble Carlsbergs all round!

IN ITS desperation to find something else to worry about, the *Daily Mail* has managed to confuse a forthcoming video game with an image created by evil terrorists.

What the *Mail* described as "al-Qaeda's terrifying vision of a devastated America", a picture showing the wreckage of Washington DC after a nuclear attack, was actually created as an early piece of concept art for Bethesda Softworks' Fallout 3. It first appeared in the gaming press in July 2007.

Though the *Mail* failed to credit the origin of this fanciful story, preferring to cite anonymous "FBI sources", it began on the website of the SITE Intelligence Group, which claimed the image was found on an al-Qaeda forum along with other terrorist fantasies.

Peculiarly, when the SITE team were accused by the *Telegraph* of being "red-faced" at their blunder, they insisted that they felt no such embarrassment. "SITE rejects the claims by the *Telegraph* and stands fully behind the accuracy of its information and analysis. SITE at no time maintained that the image 'was created by extremists'." But they failed to acknowledge that the image was created by the art team at Bethesda Softworks' headquarters in Maryland – an unlikely hotbed of al-Qaeda plotters.

The *Daily Mail*, meanwhile, has refused to allow any comments pointing this out on its website, where the original, apocalyptic story remains for all to enjoy.

LORD Turner's appointment as head of the Financial Services Authority was welcomed with extraordinary treacle by the *Daily Mail*'s City pages.

It hailed Turner as "highly respected… a safe pair of hands" and said he would "command automatic respect in the highest echelons of the banking industry". Passing swiftly over his £433,000 salary (for a three-day week), the paper said Turner would "need to muster every ounce of his renowned boldness and agility of mind for the task ahead".

Can this be the same Lord Turner who as CBI chief Adair Turner was attacked repeatedly as a simpering crony of the then Prime Minister Tony Blair? It certainly could. And could this change in mood have anything to do with *Daily Mail* City editor Alex Brummer's unusual closeness to the Chancellor, Alistair Darling, and his desire to promote Turner as a rival to the independent-minded Bank of England governor Mervyn King? Surely not!

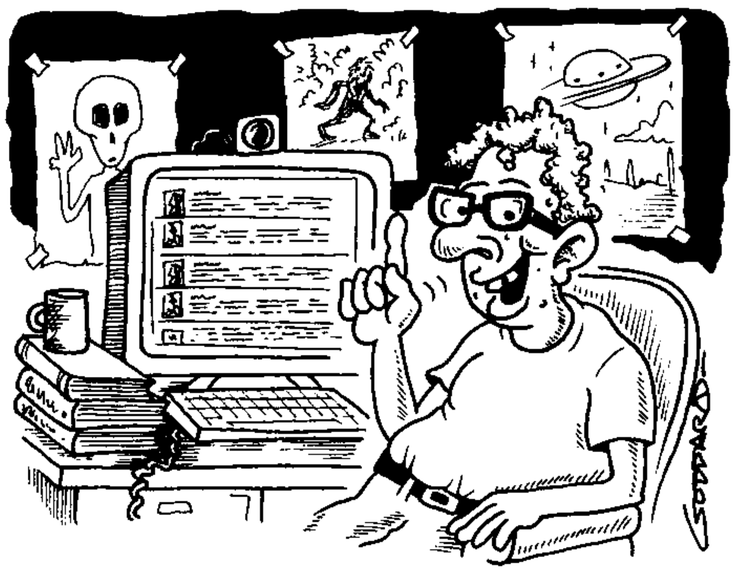
TALK of the *Daily Mail*'s revamped website going upmarket has, alas, proved a tad wide of the mark. Hapless supremo Martin Clarke – once tipped as editor Paul Dacre's heir – has taken the online *Mail* so scabrously gutterward that, according to one appalled exec, "it makes the *Daily Sport* look like *University Challenge*".

There is, however, some hope for Clarke: Dacre remains such a Luddite that he has yet to log on.

SENSE OF PERSPECTIVE

"Being vague or downright untruthful about my real age is something that has haunted me from the first time I did it… When I finally met my future husband – when he was 26 and I was, as far as he knew, 37 – visits to see my mum were always fraught with anxiety lest she reveal my date of birth. I became quite relieved when she developed senile dementia."

– Liz Jones, 94 (Surely '49'? Ed). Mail on Sunday, 24 May



"Thanks to the Internet it is now possible to be extremely well informed and completely wrong at the same time"

THE ZZZ-LIST

Truly pathetic non-stories about celebrities from the national press…

"Uma Thurman was among the most recent passengers to experience a less than smooth arrival at Heathrow's new Terminal 5. The actress appeared disgruntled after suffering an hour-long delay at New York's JFK airport, followed by a 30-minute wait for her luggage in London. Hands shielding her face, the star of *Kill Bill* and *Pulp Fiction* refused to comment."

– Daily Telegraph

Wife beaters waiting up to year for course

Carlisle News & Star

HACKS at the *Telegraph* were initially bemused by last month's reappearance of the logo at the head of the daily leader column, which had been dropped from the paper at some point in the 1970s. Why, they wondered, was forward-looking editor-in-chief Will Lewis so keen to resurrect something from so far in the past?

Then they noticed the direction that the arrow of the electric telegraph at the centre of the illustration had been altered to point in…

LESS THAN two years ago Harry Mount was sacked by the *Daily Telegraph*. Yet the paper has now welcomed him back as a regular feature-writer and columnist. How so?

Readers of the recent memoir by Harry's dad, Ferdinand Mount, will know that his many famous relations include David Cameron. The Tory leader loyally raised Harry's plight when he encountered *Torygraph* supremo Will Lewis a while ago, accusing him of being "the man who sacked my cousin". Hence the resumption of Sermons from the Mount.

But would Harry be better suited to a red-top? Last month, after the Chelsea siege in which police shot barrister Mark Saunders, Mount left a phone-message for Saunders's wife, Liz Clarke, who happens to be his former girlfriend. She was touched to hear of his sympathy and tender concern. Meanwhile, however, he sent an email to a close friend of Clarke, who he guessed would have talked to her. "Give me all the gory details," he pleaded hungrily.

Alas! Unbeknown to Harry, Liz Clarke was in fact staying with the friend and using her email address for contact with the outside world. So it was that the distraught widow found this tasteful message from her ex-boyfriend popping up in the inbox. If Mount ever finds himself out of work again, no doubt the *News of the* Screws will find a berth for him.

IT'S usually Hollywood that rewrites history to show the US taking credit for British military successes, but the *Daily Telegraph* has now turned the tables.

With a major news story, an editorial and even a Garland cartoon, the paper has been boasting how the war in Afghanistan has reached its "tipping point" thanks to the brilliant achievements of "British forces" in "decapitating" the Taliban by killing their leaders and 7,000 of their fighters.

After a succession of reverses in Helmand province, the Taliban are on the verge of defeat – all apparently due to "the skill and determination of our armed forces in tackling a fierce and determined enemy".

But glaringly absent from the *Telegraph* coverage (whose defence correspondent was embedded with British troops) was any mention of the crucial role played in recent operations by the US, which, since the US 82nd Airborne Division took back Musa Qala last Christmas, has had more troops in Helmand than the British. The Americans provide 90 percent of the air cover, and their successful co-operation with the British has achieved what the US Marine Colonel Pete Petronzio has called putting "a stopper in the bottle". But although the colonel has been quick to recognise the help given by his British allies, it seems the British media have not been keen to return the compliment.

OH, YEAH? CYCLISTS will be permitted to ride the wrong way up one-way streets to encourage more people to give up their cars.
– Evening Standard, Safer Cycling Campaign

HACKWATCH

Poll Vaulting

ACCORDING to Simon Heffer in last Thursday's *Telegraph*, it had been "pretty obvious to most people for the past four months" that Hillary Clinton was doomed. "When I was last here in New York, the state for which she is a senator, it was Super Tuesday, and even then the game appeared to be up."

Shome mishtake, surely? What he actually wrote in his previous column from New York, on 7 February, was that no one could predict the outcome of the Clinton-Obama contest: "The race is too close to call, and could last until the convention in Denver at the end of August."

Still, Heffer is only a tourist. Perhaps the paper's resident US editor, Toby Harnden, had a clearer idea of what was happening.

Or, then again, perhaps not. "I'd like to make a few predictions about what might happen in this already extraordinary 2008 White House race," Harnden wrote on the *Telegraph* website on 6 September last year. "Hillary Clinton will win the Democratic nomination, sweeping the primaries… Rudy Giuliani will win the Republican nomination… John McCain will pull out of the Republican race in October [2007]." Although some people said McCain wasn't a quitter, "I think he will choose to step down with honour sooner rather than later."

And what about the presidential election itself? "In January 2009, President Hillary Clinton will be sworn in as commander-in-chief on the steps of the Capitol."

On 28 December, with scarcely a blush, Harnden revised his forecasts. Barack Obama would win the Democratic nomination, he now realised, while the Republicans would choose Rudy Giuliani, with Mike Huckabee as his running-mate.

Three days later, on New Year's Eve, the *Independent* wheeled out heavyweight pundit Bruce "the Brute" Anderson to give his expert assessment. Having dispensed with Obama ("he is only a novice") and John McCain ("it is not clear that he has a temperament to be president"), he concluded: "In November, Mitt Romney will defeat Hillary Clinton for the presidency."

But then another thought struck him. On 14 January, the Brute wrote a follow-up column touting the chances of another candidate: "Don't rule out [Michael] Bloomberg in this race."

Sun editor Rebekah Wade was equally keen not to rule anyone out, though for a different reason: she wasn't sure which candidate had the Dirty Digger's blessing. An editorial on 5 January noted that Barack Obama had "stormed into an amazing lead in the first run-up poll" but added hastily that "nobody can write off fellow Democrat and former First Lady Hillary Clinton making history as the USA's first woman leader". A wise precaution, for although Murdoch's Fox News led the campaign against Hillary when she was First Lady, more recently the Digger hosted a fund-raising event for her.

Last week, when the outcome was clear, Murdoch characteristically switched allegiance to the front-runner. "He is a rock star," Murdoch said of Obama in a speech in California. "I think he will win and I am anxious to meet him."

Wade got the message, running an ecstatic leader headed "American Hero" in last Wednesday's paper. "History is in the making as Barack Obama surges towards the US presidency," it raved. "The *Sun* salutes an extraordinary man who has captured the imagination of the world."

As veteran observers of American politics know, however, it ain't over until William Rees-Mogg sings. The Somerset sage, who in 1995 declared confidently that Colin Powell would be elected president the following year "with a large majority", informed *Times* readers on 31 December 2007 that "Hillary Clinton should be ahead or level in Iowa, ahead in New Hampshire and should virtually win the nomination on Super Tuesday." His next oracular bulletin, in the *Mail on Sunday* on 14 January, added that although a Obama-McCain battle would be the most exciting since Kennedy-Nixon, "the actual contest is more likely to be Clinton-Huckabee". That was enough to sabotage Huckabee and Clinton.

On 27 April, after further entrail-reading, Rees-Mogg wrote in the *MoS* that "the arithmetic of the Democratic primaries is now clear. Neither Senator Hillary Clinton nor Senator Barack Obama can win enough delegates in the remaining primaries to reach an overall majority."

And so it came to pass.

"LABOUR's so out of touch with the lives of working people that they keep on making things worse," declared David Cameron recently. "A new Conservative government will be on the side of working people."

But what will this mean in practice? A clue is provided by an employment tribunal which opened last month in east London.

Matt Driscoll, a former sportswriter on the *News of the World*, is claiming unfair dismissal and disability discrimination at the hands of his then boss, Andy Coulson, now Cameron's right-hand-man as the Tories' director of communications. Driscoll was signed off with stress in 2006. One day later, Coulson sent instructions to his deputy: "I want him out quickly and cheaply." Despite the fact that Driscoll's GP had advised him to distance himself from the office because his stress was work-related, he claims he was "bombarded" at home with emails, phone calls and recorded letters by Coulson's staff, before finally being dismissed in April 2007 for his failure to give a date on which he would return to work.

By that time, of course, Coulson himself had left the paper having finally decided to take responsibility for the illegal activities of royal correspondent Clive Goodman and private investigator Glen Mulcaire, which he funded to the tune of more than £100,000 but claimed to have known nothing about.

Driscoll's tribunal hearing has now been adjourned, and all concerned will have to wait until September to discover if, in Mr Cameron's immortal words, "sunshine wins the day".

"DEEP in the Amazon jungle, one of Brazil's last uncontacted indigenous tribes has been photographed from the air, to prove its existence," reported the *Guardian*'s website breathlessly, mere minutes after the government in Brasilia released footage of the Terra Indigena Kampa e Isolados do Envira.

"The tribes are untouched by the outside world and their way of life has apparently changed little in thousands of years."

The effect of this astonishing news was only slightly spoiled by the accompanying Google map, which came complete with a postal address for the area and the offer to "get driving directions to here".

"Can't talk now, we're being attacked by a giant fire-breathing silver bird in the sky"

RICH MAN, POOR MAN, BEGGARMAN, PEER

LORD ROGERS of Riverside may be a peer of the realm, but as the radical *chic* architect Richard Rogers he also likes to be seen as a man of the people.

In his capacity as "urban adviser" to Ken Livingstone, he was forever holding forth about the need for affordable housing and ecologically sound development, even though most of his firm's profits in recent years have come from two of the biggest airports ever built, Madrid and T5 at Heathrow.

Imagine his embarrassment, then, on finding himself and his wife Ruth, co-founder of the River Café, included in this year's *Sunday Times* Rich List with their joint wealth estimated at £52m.

His lordship has now forced the paper to remove him from the online version of the list and print a grovelling apology. To underline the point, he has published a letter in *Building Design* magazine boasting of just how poor he is. Although the *Sunday Times* valued his stake in Rogers Stirk Harbour & Partners at £40m, he explains that all 20,000 preference shares in the partnership are in fact owned by a charity. "There are eight ordinary shares, of which I own two," he says. "However, under the practice's constitution, no equity or value attaches to these ordinary shares other than a nominal value of £1 each. So my two shares are worth two pounds, not £40m."

This heart-tugging plea of poverty is itself a bit rich, not to say economical with the truth. According to Rogers, the firm's "constitution" limits directors' income to a multiple of nine times the salary of the "lowest-paid fully qualified architect". But he omits to add that the multiplier is based on take-home pay, not gross salary. Rogers' "limited" salary is then hugely grossed up to pay his tax bill.

Nor does he mention profit-related bonuses, of which he gets a massive proportion. His annual take from the practice before tax is more than £2.5m – over 70 times the salary of the most junior architect.

The Thames Wharf Charity, which owns the shares in his practice, also nominally "owns" the Rogers drawing collection, currently estimated to be worth £5m, of which the jewel in the crown is the full set of original drawings for the 1971 Pompidou Centre competition. Will these and other drawings and models remain in the charity's collection in years to come, instead of being claimed by Rogers on the grounds that they preceded the introduction of his much-vaunted "constitution" in 1989? We shall see.

And what of his other assets? In 1984 Rogers bought a large house in Royal Avenue, Chelsea, which is now valued at £12m and, as his principal residence, free of capital gains tax (CGT) on disposal. Some years ago he also bought his parents' former house on Wimbledon Common, now worth an estimated £3m. Meanwhile, Rogers and his wife own 59.5 percent of the equity in River Café, which makes annual profits of about £1.5m. If sold as a going concern, the café would probably fetch £10m, of which the Rogers' share would be £6m. Oh, and six months ago Rogers sold his interests in the Hammersmith properties that house both the café and his practice for £7.5m. Since he paid only 10 percent CGT (as against the 18 percent announced in the November pre-budget, which came into force this April), this earned him more than £6m after tax.

Although the Rich List undoubtedly overcooked their wealth, Rogers and his wife are probably worth about £30m. No great surprise: he is one of the most successful architects of his generation. But unlike his former partner Lord Foster, who recently sold a 50 percent stake in *his* practice for upwards of £120m and now lives in Swiss tax exile, proudly showing off his palatial lakeside chateau, Rogers demands apologies from newspapers which dare to suggest he has more than a couple of quid to rub together. Why so coy?

GORDON BROWN made much of his determination to rid the world of the cluster bombs that kill and maim civilians when the international treaty banning them was signed in Dublin a fortnight ago. He even promised to dispose of Britain's stocks.

The MoD, however, is doing its bit to ensure that the firms who will suffer aren't left out of pocket. US arms firms Raytheon, recent purveyors of death in Lebanon and Afghanistan, did a nice line in the rockets that transport cluster bombs, but there's still plenty of cash coming their way through the £11bn training deal they have signed as part of the Metrix consortium (*Eyes passim*), currently building a huge military academy in South Wales.

With the help of Raytheon – whose other delightful recent innovations include a "pain ray" that disperses crowds by emitting microwaves pitched to stimulate human nerves to agonising effect – Metrix has serious ambitions in the expanding market for military equipment training.

GORDON BROWN tried to go nuclear in his "fightback" strategy, unexpectedly telling Scottish Oil executives last month: "We will be more ambitious for our plans for nuclear in the future."

Gordon's atomic announcement is supposed to be a decisive response to the energy crisis, taking on rising oil prices and global warming in one brave radioactive step. However, he offered little detail about who would build the plants, where, and with what money or guarantees.

The trouble is that every time Gordon edges towards new nuclear power, the atomic companies do something embarrassing. A day before his announcement, two more British Energy (BE) atomic plants were closed. With ten of BE's 16 units down for maintenance or faults, this closure led to blackouts.

Brown's solution to the failures of home-grown nuclear is enticing foreign firms to do the work. Happily, Electricité de France (EDF) has been generating loads of nuclear power for years and is interested in the UK. Even more happily, Andrew Brown, brother of Gordon, works as EDF's British "director of corporate communications". There the happiness ends, though. EDF is building a new nuclear power station at Flamanville on the other side of the English Channel, and the Areva pressurised-water reactor could be a model for new British plants. Unfortunately, just before Brown spoke, the French Nuclear Safety Authority stepped in and halted EDF's work at Flamanville. The authority had "observed a number of irregularities on the building site", in particular the fact that the concrete and reinforcement did not meet specifications and were showing cracks.

The other Areva reactor being built in Finland is two years behind schedule because of concrete problems.

WHAT explains Thanet MP Steve Ladyman's contradictory advice to Gordon Brown on behalf of British motorists?

The former transport minister seemed to have "gone native" after appearing on BBC TV's *Top Gear*, suggesting that Gordon Brown should heed the advice of petrol-head Jeremy Clarkson. In an article for Labour's *Progress* magazine, Ladyman called for a "new deal" with motorists, explaining that Labour voters' "attachment to the motorcar" was stronger than their attachment to the party. He recommended his boss start scrabbling for votes by scrapping the fuel duty escalator, cutting petrol taxes and easing back on "green" taxes on cars.

Oddly, however, the article also contained some decidedly non petrol-headed recommendations. He said that "road pricing will have to remain part of our vision" (the Clarkson lobby hates the notion) and also called for a "huge and rapid expansion of active traffic management".

FACT: As well as being an MP, Ladyman is also a consultant for ITIS, a firm that specialises in computerised traffic analysis (which will be needed for both road pricing and "active traffic management").

NOTTS MP Paddy Tipping is the latest Labour figure to privatise himself. Tipping was deputy leader of the House of Commons until last June and is still MP for Sherwood.

In April he took on two extra jobs, as chairman of both the North Nottinghamshire and Greater Nottinghamshire LIFT Companies. The "LIFTcos" are the government's latest PFI-style privatisation of the NHS. Big companies just weren't interested in little doctors' surgeries and clinics, so the government bundled them together, handing the group of clinics, care centres and the like to "special purpose" companies.

When the *Eye* asked Tipping how much he would earn from his new jobs, and if he was simply cashing in on government policy, he said he would get £18,000 a year for the part-time chairmanships on top of his MP salaries, and that he took the jobs because "I want better primary care in Nottinghamshire and that's why I am involved". Nice to know he's not just profiting from doing what any good MP should for his constituency, then.

CALLED TO ORDURE

WHEN Gordon Brown's long-term hatchet woman Lady Vadera – the fiery former Treasury official Shriti Vadera – was made to grovel before a Commons committee, MPs haven't enjoyed a bout of apologetic boot-licking so much for a long time.

Business minister Vadera was summoned by the European scrutiny committee, which has been repeatedly ignored by Whitehall. This committee has no power to stop European agreements but does exert something called a "scrutiny reserve" – the right to delay Europe-linked laws until they have been chewed over for a few months.

In the past year the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (DBER) has simply bypassed this body, seemingly taking the view that its MPs were Eurosceptic old farts who got in the way. That used to be a feasible option; but since October 2006 the committee has been chaired with snorting irritation by Labour Eurosceptic Michael Connarty. Not a man to be trifled with.

Connarty's committee sent repeated requests to DBER about two new government proposals. One was a European "action plan on information and communication technologies and ageing". Another was about a "multi-annual community programme on promoting safer use of the internet", complete with "awareness nodes".

The content may have been piffling, but not the costs. Tory MP David Heathcoat-Amory pointed out that many millions of pounds are being spent on these European Commission ideas. The committee's requests to know more were placed on a shelf at DBER and, er, left unread for months.

The committee, when it learnt this, was peeved. Hence Vadera's summons. The MPs glowered at her. She smiled back with plump coquettishness and started to murmur in a pukka Chelsea accent. She apologised languidly for the recent slights to the committee's honour.

Connarty, declining to melt at her charm, said bluntly that he was keen to "stop this sort of thing happening again" and reminded the smug minister: "We don't invite ministers here lightly." In other words, watch it.

Vadera initially twiddled her fingers round a small piece of paper and gave the impression she was not entirely gripped by the urgency of his demand. Connarty stared, hard. Vadera gulped and stopped playing with the piece of paper. She announced that in future the department would have a "single point of contact" with the committee to ensure its views were "passed on to policy leads". She added: "There will be a monthly scorecard reporting system." The committee, unimpressed, moved not a whisker.

Heathcoat-Amory said that DBER had broken its "constitutional requirements". He thought the department was thoroughly useless. Vadera, now starting to talk faster and say "um" and "er" a lot, promised that her "scorecard" wheeze would be overseen by some senior Herbert. "It is a systemic solution," she said, reaching into the Whitehall jargon bag.

Vadera denied that DBER was "a dusty little department not up to the job". She said there would be a "training and awareness programme for the whole department to ensure that they are aware of the role of this committee". If you think this was a diplomatic way of saying: "We're going to tell everyone what a pain in the arse you lot can be," you might not be entirely wrong.

Connarty, after listening to particularly long bit of waffle, told Vadera her remarks were "quite complex" (ie remarkably windy). He hoped that when the department received queries from the committee in future, "a loud klaxon would go off until the questions have been answered". Vadera gave a weak smile. By now she was waving her hands in the air and saying "y'know" and "sort of" a good deal.

She also tried blustering about "human error" and said: "These things can happen." What? Repeated letters arrive from a parliamentary committee and they are ignored for months? Human error? High-handed civil servant contempt for parliament, more like.

'Gavel Basher'

MORE on the Environment Agency's batty plan to sell off Thames lock houses (see *Eyes* 1211 & 1210) to save money. River officials don't actually know whether flogging the houses will be more expensive than keeping them!

This startling revelation emerged when Thames Valley MPs questioned agency officials. Afterwards, Maidenhead MP Theresa May said the bureaucrats were "unable to say how much money they would save, nor could they guarantee that the removal of resident lock keepers wouldn't cost more money than keeping them".

MPs from the Thames region who attended the meeting added that the EA officials didn't seem to realise how much work resident lock keepers do and how valuable it is to river users. The MPs are now trying to arrange a meeting with Environment, Food and Rural Affairs minister Phil Woolas, whose officials appear even less well informed about the plan.

"For heaven's sake, Gerald – people are beginning to talk"

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

EMBARRASSING revelations about the misuse of expenses by several Tory MEPs, including Giles Chichester, John Purvis and Den Dover, highlight the way members of the European parliament are supposed to spend their (very) generous allowances.

Under parliamentary rules, MEPs are allowed to appoint "paying agents" to manage the cash they get for office expenses and staff costs – around £35,000 annually for the former and £135,000 for the latter. The mistake Chichester, Purvis and Dover made was to have the money paid to their own companies, which is forbidden under EU rules. But what is the difference between this and simply contracting a close family member as a "paying agent"?

For example, as documents seen by the *Eye* show, celebrity Labour MEP Michael Cashman (he used to be in *EastEnders*), has since at least 2002 had the entire assistants' allowance paid to his civil partner Paul Cottingham, who manages the money in his role as Cashman's paying agent – at least £500,000 since 2002.

Cashman [*sic*] is not alone: goggle-eyed climate-change-denying Tory Roger Helmer has his wife as paying agent, while UKIP's Gerard Batten admits to "occasionally" using the professional services of a family member in this respect, according to research done by the think tank Open Europe.

MEPs proportionally have a far greater propensity to employ family members than do MPs at Westminster. The European parliament is banning this practice after the 2009 Euro elections, meaning P45s all round for the spouses of Sir Robert Atkins (who used his expenses to attend his son's wedding in the US!), Giles Chichester (yes, him again!), Richard Corbett, Nigel Farage, Chris Heaton-Harris, Neil Parish, Charles Tannock, Gary Titley, Geoffrey Van Orden, Diana Wallis, Graham Watson, Sajjad Karim and at least seven other UK MEPs.

EU-phemisms

Who is this amateur? We're all doing three times as much...

JUST FANCY THAT!

My money in safe hands
The retirement I've worked for
Pass something onto my children
You can get it if you really want

– Party slogans appearing above profiles of Tory MEPs Giles Chichester, John Purvis and Den Dover, all in trouble for misuse of parliamentary expenses, on www.conservatives.com

PARLIAMENTARY lobbyists always deny they are involved in influence-peddling, but a spat over who represents McDonald's suggests otherwise.

The fast-food giant (and regular Labour donor) has sacked lobbyist Bell Pottinger and hired Portland, the PR firm run by Tony Blair's former aide, Tim Allan. Bell Pottinger boss Peter Bingle responded in the pages of *PR Week* with a bitchy swipe at his former employer.

He described the move by McDonald's acidly, saying it was an "interesting decision" to appoint Blair's former spin doctor "as McDonald's prepares to deal with the last two years of a Gordon Brown government and the likely election of a Conservative government".

Bingle seems to suggest Bell Pottinger would be better at dealing with an incoming Tory government than Allan's mob. But hang on: don't lobbyists always say they are selling their communication skills rather than their insider knowledge?

Ethics certainly won't be a problem, however. Allan may have been a leading Labour figure, but that did not stop him running an anti-union campaign for Asda. So he shouldn't have any problem working for anti-union, low-pay, high-fat McDonald's.

THE impending climate change law has sparked frantic lobbying from an aviation industry desperate not to be included in compulsory targets for cutting emissions by 2050. But why are public bodies and supposedly independent publications allowing themselves to be used to promote the idea that flying is practically green already?

At the Science Museum, European aerospace corporation EADS is sponsoring an exhibition of greener planes, highlighting "technologies tackling the issue" of climate change. "So flying might not be a big problem for climate change at the moment..." states one display – although many scientists would disagree. Another says that aviation produces "just a few percent" of global greenhouse gas emissions. While there is a mention that visitors could reduce their own flying, it is undermined by all the references to future lightweight "eco-friendly jets".

FORMER Lord Chief Justice Lord Woolf is challenging Lord Hutton of Baghdad as the upper house's top whitewasher.

Fresh from giving a clean bill of health to, er, BAe, Woolf was asked to judge a complaint from the *Guardian* that in 2005 former Labour chairman Lord Hoyle had introduced a defence lobbyist with whom he was on a retainer to the then defence procurement minister Lord Drayson – without mentioning he was on the lobbyist's payroll.

Hoyle simply couldn't remember whether he had told Drayson of his sideline. Could Lord Drayson? Nobody will know, as Woolf didn't feel the need to interview him.

In any case, noted the Committee for Privileges report, Hoyle "says that the meeting was social rather than business. He says that Mr Wood [the lobbyist] is not a lobbyist for the arms industry but an adviser to the defence and aerospace industries". Which are completely different things, of course.

And how could everything not be above board when, the committee recorded, "the meeting took place in the House of Lords Guest Room, which is not a place that would normally be chosen for cloak-and-dagger activities"?

Having forensically applied one of the country's finest legal minds to a potential breach of standards, Woolf rejected the complaint, adding gratuitously: "In any event, this is not a case that in our view would warrant any further action against Lord Hoyle."

Thus does parliament continue Gordon's drive to "restore public trust".

'Backbiter'

LONDON CALLING

FUN-LOVING Welsh hack Guto Harri, the former BBC political reporter, is one of the chaps brought in by David Cameron to keep an eye on Boris Johnson. But who will keep an eye on Harri?

Before becoming the mayor's chief spin-doctor, Harri was employed fleetingly by lobbyists Fleishman Hillard, in which capacity he attended the firm's reception at the Scottish parliament last month.

He began the evening impressing female interns with tales of his latest trip to Zimbabwe to advise Morgan Tsvangirai. As the hours and the drinks slipped by, however, things turned "a bit leery", with much slobbering over the interns ("My word, you're a *very* pretty young girl") and loud lectures to anyone who would listen on why Tony Blair was a racist, why Saddam Hussein was a great feminist and why Britain should have invaded Saudi Arabia instead of Iraq. A group of Labour women who queried his views were told to shut up "because you're wankers".

Fleishman colleagues eventually dragged him away, still yelling abuse, and put him on the sleeper-train to London before he could insult any more of their clients. The very next day he announced that he was joining Boris – just in time to publicise the mayor's crusade against boorish behaviour and public drunkenness!

LONDON mayor Boris Johnson is on the verge of appointing former Tory mayoral candidate Steve Norris to the board of Transport for London because of Norris's long experience in the field. Unfortunately, none of it is good.

Norris was a director of Jarvis from 2000, sitting on the board at the time of the 2002 Potters Bar crash. Jarvis, which maintained the rails, admitted liability and made payouts to those killed in the derailment.

Norris was also a director of Jarvis when it was part of the Tubelines consortium which runs much of the underground under the disastrous PPP privatisation. The firm helped get the tube PPP started but could not stick around: it had to pull out of Tubelines and sell its share because the firm was in a financial tailspin.

Norris, however, has other links with the Underground privatisation. He also sits on the board of a company called AMT-Sybex, alongside former Tory leader William Hague. AMT-Sybex was a leading subcontractor to Metronet, the consortium running the other half of the tube PPP. In 2005 it sold Metronet a £15m computer system to list all the firm's assets. Compiling this asset register was one of Metronet's most important tasks. Nobody really knew what had been handed over to the firm in the privatisation, and a register would help build a schedule of which bits of rail, cable and the like needing fixing.

In 2006, however, Tube regulator Chris Bolt found Metronet's costs were rising, not least because of extra costs on the AMT-Sybex computer system. And even with AMT-Sybex help Metronet was unable to get as good a grip on its assets as the other Tube firms. Metronet collapsed because of problems with prices and schedules, leaving Norris linked to yet another transport failure. So... just the man for the job!

OBAMA AND THE MYSTERIOUS MR AUCHI

UNTIL Carter Fuck & Partners and England's stifling libel laws got to work, the few American journalists not caught up in Obama-mania were turning to the archives of the British press to answer an intriguing question: who is Nadhmi Auchi?

Facts elsewhere were sparse. According to *Forbes*, Auchi was the 279 richest man in the world and a "onetime go-between for major oil companies and state-owned oil fields". The only criticism its rich list noted was "for hosting a lavish 1,000-person wedding for his son on the same day that the anti-poverty Live 8 concert kicked off in adjacent Hyde Park".

Nothing *Forbes* said explained how an Iraqi exile with British citizenship had ended up on the fringes of an Obama property deal in Chicago in 2005.

Barack (pictured above) and his wife Michelle had been enchanted by a neo-Georgian house on the South Side – complete with Honduran mahogany bookcases and a wine cellar. They couldn't meet the asking price for house and surrounding grounds, and turned to their old friend Tony Rezko, who stepped in with $625,000 to buy the adjoining lot.

The slum landlord and fast-food tycoon had bankrolled Obama's campaigns in Illinois politics from 1995 onwards, but this month a federal jury in Chicago convicted the Syrian-born businessman on 16 counts of corruption. The court found him guilty of using his influence with state officials around Illinois governor Rod R. Blagojevich to shake down firms looking for official contracts.

As the case went through the courts, the mysterious name of Nadhmi Auchi (pictured right) kept popping up. Just before Rezko helped out the Obamas, the Chicago press noted that he had gone into partnership with Auchi on a land development deal. Federal investigators then revealed that Auchi wired $3.5m to the financially strapped Rezko in Chicago less than a month before the Obama house and land purchases. In other words, while Rezko was bankrolling Obama, Auchi was bankrolling Rezko.

Obama said he had no recollection of meeting Auchi. During Rezko's trial, Stuart Levine, a former Illinois political fixer turned state witness, told the court that the Obamas attended a reception Rezko organised for Auchi in 2004.

As Rezko awaits his sentence and Obama receives the Democratic nomination, you would expect American journalists to investigate the Auchi connection. If they do, they will find Auchi's lawyers are ahead of them and have scrubbed the web of newspaper reports which displeased their master.

Carter Fuck's first target was a series of revelatory articles printed in the *Observer* in 2003, which American bloggers and journalists were starting to notice. They described how Auchi had left Iraq in 1979 but remained on such good terms with Saddam's genocidal regime he could help organise the sale of Italian frigates to the Iraqi defence ministry.

As he made his fortune in the arms and oil businesses, the *Observer* noted that Auchi collected politicians "the way other men collect stamps". In Britain he gave directorships to Keith Vaz, David Steel and Norman Lamont. In 1999, on the 20th anniversary of his arrival in Britain, 130 MPs, including Tony Blair and Charles Kennedy, signed a congratulatory card.

The political connections were put to good use when the French authorities tried to extradite Auchi to face charges that he was involved in the Elf Affair, the biggest financial scandal in recent French history. For two years Auchi fought extradition, but finally gave himself up and the French court gave him a 15-month suspended sentence.

You will search in vain now, however, to find most of the *Observer*'s reports. The indisputable fact that Auchi is a convicted criminal has not inhibited Carter Fuck's enforcers. All they have had to say is that Mr Auchi is appealing against his conviction for the press to fold.

After Mr Justice Eady allowed the Saudi billionaire Khalid Bin Mahfouz to sue, even though he had paid a huge fine to the New York authorities for his part in the collapse of the crooked Bank of Credit and Commerce International, newspaper lawyers know judges will allow anyone, however dodgy, to take them to court. They prefer to give in to pressure than to take on litigious plutocrats and a hostile judiciary.

Meanwhile the *Times*, which has scooped the American press on the Rezko-Auchi connection, is also in Carter Fuck's sights. Its website now runs corrections of the "Mr Auchi has asked us to make it clear" variety. In most cases, the *Times* never made the disputed allegations in the first place, but the corrections create the impression there is something not quite right about their stories.

Barack Obama is a lucky politician. If American journalists had led the way in investigating his shady connections, the US first amendment would have protected their work. As it was, the British press took the lead – and libel lawyers can censor it without anyone noticing.

'Ratbiter'

HOSPITAL PASS

BRITAIN'S pioneering hospital for vulnerable people with complex personality disorders has been "temporarily" closed – the latest victim of the government's "joined-up" health policy.

Despite its international reputation for treating people with severe psychological problems, the Henderson Hospital in south-west London has effectively been starved out of service.

Providing residential care for up to 30 people whose disorders make them the most difficult to treat, the Henderson used to receive central funding. Then it was decided that primary health care trusts should each contribute £23,000 annually towards its costs in the event that one or more of their patients needed the specialist service. But some trusts opted out, saying they would pay on a case-by-case basis, in the region of £100,000 per person.

Until national funding was withdrawn in 2005, there was a six-month waiting list to get into the hospital. Since then, lack of funded admissions forced the "temporary" closure by the South West London and St George's Mental Health Trust.

While Ivan Lewis, minister for mental health and care services, has made noises about sorting out regional funding, nothing has happened, leaving the lucrative site for some huge for-profit private health company to take over. Brilliant!

"Bad news... you've got another 30 years to live"

MEDICINE BALLS

Why children die

***WHY Children Die*, a detailed analysis of UK childhood death in 2006 (and published last month), has concluded that in 69 percent of deaths there were avoidable or potentially avoidable factors. Equally alarming for a report that should be central to the reform of the NHS is that it has received virtually no publicity.**

In the study, carried out by the Confidential Enquiry into Maternal and Child Health (CEMACH) with funding from the National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA), data was gathered on 957 deaths of children in three English regions, Wales and Northern Ireland. An expert panel examined 119 deaths in detail but the "headline result of the panel data" is hidden away on page 47. According to one panel member, the release of the report was delayed by Labour citing purdah and neutered in response to pressure from the Cabinet Office and the Department of Health.

So what has the government got to be frightened of? Despite a succession of declarations on patient safety, such as the report "An Organisation with a Memory" and a safety conference attended by Gordon Brown last month, the NHS appears not to be learning much from the Bristol or Climbie disasters. In both medical and social care, children are still not getting access to expertise quickly enough.

The recurring patterns of substandard care were depressingly familiar, including: poor care of sick children by staff not adequately trained in paediatrics or supervised by those who are; failure to recognise a sick/vulnerable child; failure of follow-up; failure to immunise; and failure to refer to mental health services.

Some of the findings were unexpected (such as high rates of child suicide), but avoidable factors related to clinical and organisational care were far more predictable and possibly made worse by the government's reforms.

The devolution of frontline NHS care to the least experienced (and cheapest) staff is commonplace and "in 8 percent of hospital trusts, surgeons carrying out elective surgery did not perform enough work with children to maintain their skills". So why are strategic health authorities, commissioners and trusts allowing them to do it? Because trusts need the money.

The current obsession with public involvement is cementing the future of small, inadequately staffed paediatric units serving similar maternity units. The public (and politicians) love a cosy local unit but no one has the balls to tell them that lives are at risk when emergencies are badly managed.

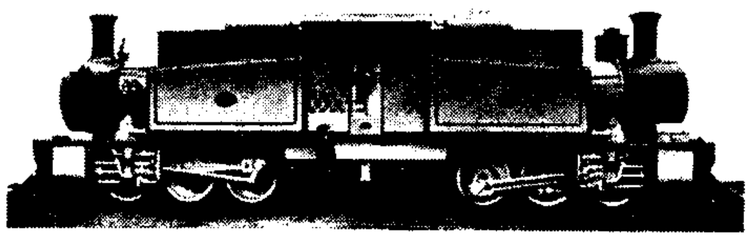
The obsession with performance targets has meant many children are erased from outpatient clinics if they fail to attend, but trusts are making no attempt to discriminate those most at risk, who are hardly to blame if an adult forgets or isn't able to take them to hospital. Referrals to the coroner's office are still not managed properly and death certificates are still littered with errors.

There were plenty of examples of excellent practice; but, as ever, the NHS hopes good care will spread by some mysterious osmosis from beacon sites, rather than building reform from the bottom up. As of April, local safeguarding children boards have been set up to continue studying child deaths, but their methodology (looking at unexpected deaths) will not identify all the avoidable factors outlined in the excellent CEMACH study.

There are salutary lessons here for everyone who works in (and uses) the NHS, but the fact that MD only heard of *Why Children Die* from a concerned *Eye* reader reveals how far Labour has to go before being open about the true extent of medical error.

M.D.

SIGNAL FAILURES



MAKING a fortune out of rail privatisation doesn't stop the fat cats coming back for more, as two former Prism Rail directors demonstrate.

Prism was a mediocre company set up to exploit the rail privatisation that one of its directors, Kenneth Irvine, had advised the government on (*Eye* 907). It won two of its franchises with unrealistic plans to cut the subsidy required, and when losses began to mount the government kindly agreed not to hold Prism to its promises. That unlocked the door for the directors to sell Prism to National Express Group in 2000 – for £166m.

Prism Rail founders Giles Fearnley and Bob Howells are now chairman and vice-chairman of Grand Central, a company that provides six rail services a day between Sunderland and London. Or doesn't, as the case may be. Grand Central's trains have been so faulty since they started in December that masses of services have been cancelled. An emergency timetable introduced last month cut direct services between Sunderland and London to just one a day in each direction. Other train operators are getting fed up with disruption caused by Grand Central's trains, one of which caught fire last month.

Grand Central was set up by Fraser Eagle, a coach company which has made a fortune from providing replacement buses during the mass closure of railways on weekends and holidays since rail privatisation. Now Grand Central is causing disruption but Fraser Eagle needn't worry about the financial consequences; it sold Grand Central last year to Equishare Partners, a private-equity firm, in a deal spearheaded by Fearnley.

Now Grand Central is being touted for sale again. It could fetch a decent price, not because it's any good but because it holds valuable slots on the mainline from King's Cross which National Express East Coast could do with. How much is National Express Group willing to give Fearnley and co this time around?

WHEN rail minister Tom Harris madè a speech recently at an Indian rail conference in New Delhi, he flagged up "Public-Private Partnership initiatives – an area of investment where the UK has gained considerable expertise".

How true. Having dealt with the disastrous collapse of Railtrack, the UK cemented its position as world leader by setting up the fabulously complicated Metronet deal for London Underground which soon crashed and left debts of £2bn. So India knows just who to call for expert legal help if one of its PPPs careers off the rails.

FIRSTGROUP has revealed UK rail profits of £120m, up 10 percent, for 2007-8. If it can achieve such a surplus in an even more troubled year than usual for its subsidiary First Great Western (which twice breached its franchise agreement, was caught raising fares by double the legal maximum and suffered a second fares strike by passengers), things are looking good.

Shareholders get a 10 percent rise in dividends, directors get their performance-related bonuses, and FirstGroup will continue to mask the government's cack-handed control of FGW (*Eye* 1205), so everyone's happy. Except passengers – but since when did they count?

'Dr B. Ching'

ROAD RAGE

PITY poor Gordon Brown, pilloried by the road lobby he has done so much to appease.

When he became chancellor, he inherited from the Tories an automatic 3 percent increase above inflation in fuel duty at every budget, and an annual 1 percent cut in regulated rail fares (including season tickets). Caving in to the road lobby, Brown froze road fuel duty for several years while raising the duty on diesel used in trains.

The rail-fare formula switched to a 1 percent annual *increase* above inflation, and several franchises now involve massive premium payments to the state – in effect a tax on train fares set to increase hugely over the next few years.

By contrast, from 1997 to 2006, the cost in real terms of car travel actually fell by 10 percent while train travel became 6 percent more expensive. From January 2005 to April 2008 motoring costs fell 4 percent. Now that motoring is becoming a bit costlier, the previous long-term decline is ignored by the road lobby and most of the media as motorists are portrayed as hard-pressed cash cows.

The plight of families with a large car or two cars is highlighted, but there is no mention that the poorest families who can't afford any car have been clobbered with huge bus-fare rises. The last *Eye* reported how bus fares around deprived Barrow-in-Furness have risen four times in three years; and last month Glasgow bus fares rocketed by up to 25 percent. These aren't freak responses to recent oil prices rises: from 1997 to 2006 bus fares increased 13 percent *above* inflation. Britain already gives buses less subsidy per passenger than other European countries, and now Labour threatens to scrap the fuel-duty rebate given to bus firms since the Tory era.

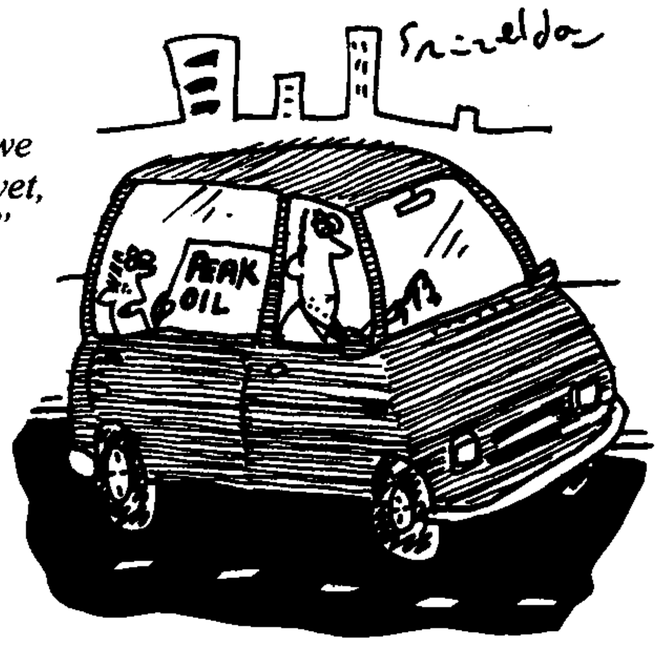
In its early years in power, "new" Labour planned to set targets for cutting traffic and increasing walking and cycling, build up to 25 new tram systems and get 80 percent more freight on to the railways by 2010. But it dropped these plans and allowed heavier trucks on the roads despite warnings it would be harder for rail freight to compete. Meanwhile Britain is building 15 times more new roads than railways; and appraisal criteria are loaded to make road schemes easier to justify than new infrastructure for public transport or cycling (*Eye* 1196).

Brown is in fact friendly to motorists in the same way that giving booze to an alcoholic is friendly. Nor can Labour counter complaints about fuel and car taxes by pointing to plentiful alternative capacity on public transport, cheaper rail and bus fares and new tram systems.

Instead Brown diverts attention to external factors: "As every country faces these increased costs, it is now widely understood that a global shock on this scale requires global solutions." Really? France and many other countries have protected themselves against rising oil prices by electrifying their main railways and investing heavily in public transport, including new tram systems. In Britain the proportion of long-distance trains powered by electricity has actually fallen since 1997, and by cutting the cost of motoring Brown has managed to make Britain even hungrier for oil.

'Hedgehog'

"Are we there yet, Dad?"



ECO SOUNDINGS

It's in the genes

THE food lobby is preparing to have another crack at persuading British consumers of the benefits of genetically-modified (GM) produce.

Food bosses are increasingly using phrases like "it's already here", "you can't stop it", "we can't compete without it" and so on; and recent food price rises are giving them the perfect excuse to step up their lobbying.

They have to be careful, of course: they don't want to upset the environmental groups they spent so long courting after Monsanto's disastrous attempt to introduce GM organisms in Europe in the 1990s. Supermarkets have been keen to promote their GM-free credentials and, for the time being, this has allowed them to avoid their produce being labelled "Frankenstein Food".

Now, via the powerful trade associations that represent big business, pro-GM muttering is growing louder and any opportunity to influence government is being taken.

When it emerged that the chancellor was to hold a "summit" with major supermarkets last month, everyone was keen to stress that this was a "private" meeting to discuss the threat posed to the UK economy by spiralling food prices. Indeed, Alistair Darling had written to his European counterparts, whimpering that "rising global food and energy prices are hitting poorest households the hardest and threatening to reverse the progress we have made in reducing poverty".

But few economists think the government can do anything about food inflation, which is a global issue. Perhaps the food lobby has reached the same conclusion, as the British Retail Consortium and Food & Drink Federation are flogging round a draft "follow-up" letter to Darling for their retail members which says very little about poverty but devotes a good deal of space to lobbying the chancellor on the GM issue.

The draft contains this carefully worded nugget: "You will remember we raised the growing problem of trade with countries outside the EU due to the zero tolerance approach to unapproved GM products. Whilst we are not pro-GM we are extremely concerned that as the rest of the world continues to develop new varieties of products it will hamper our trade of major commodities… We would urge the UK to push other Member States to reach a pragmatic position on GMs."

Why such keenness to say "we are not pro-GM" when everyone knows the opposite is the case? And which supermarket giant will be the first to break ranks and have the courage to tackle the green groups head on? The letter may never make it to Number 11, but at least we now know what was really discussed with the chancellor.

FIVE TV

The Property List (Five)

IT WAS never going to be easy to be a property series on Five. For a start, there's the problem that the obvious title – *House* – has already been taken by a show about a miserable but brilliant American medic. Now there's the additional difficulty that, reversing the trick, *No Signs Of Life* would, these days, be quite a good name for a programme about the housing market.

Many professions have had dips in confidence: it was tough being an LA bathhouse when Aids was first diagnosed or a chicken-farmer during outbreaks of bird flu. But you really, really do not want to be launching a new TV property series this summer.

Realising that many of their viewers would not be house-hunters but people seeking car-crash TV, **The Property List** addressed this question immediately. Co-presenter Melissa Porter perked: "With so much talk of the property market collapsing and the difficulty of getting a mortgage, now, more than ever, buying a house is one of the most difficult decisions you'll ever make!"

As chutzpah goes, this was akin to leaving funeral-home catalogues in an intensive-care unit. But, strangely, when Melissa, dark and smouldering, and co-host Ian Blandford, small bald and bouncy, then introduced their list of the top ten coastal locations in Britain, their choices all seemed curiously immune to the down-turn.

Take Tynemouth: "Despite the credit crunch, the housing market here has remained in good shape!" Or St Andrews: "Largely untouched by the recent credit crunch, a hot-spot for the buy-to-let market!" Or Aldeburgh: "Against national trends, research shows that house prices are actually rising in this part of Suffolk!"

If this sounded like estate agent blather, it was. The end credits included the note "statistical research: Savills" and one of the company's top bods kept popping up during the show to stress that there really couldn't be a better time to buy.

In fact, the programme was essentially tele-marketing posing as an independent consumer show. The presenters' links could easily have appeared on a Savills website. Striding over the dunes at Tynemouth, Ian huckstered: "Golden sands and award-winning beaches in all directions! But Newcastle is only 20 minutes away! No wonder so many young professionals live here!"

"His favourite colour is 'pea-green'"

The hosts then conducted video tours of houses up for sale in each area, naming the asking price. But, as estate agents wouldn't but journalists should, they never questioned whether this price was higher or lower than similar recent properties, nor were we ever told if the properties had attracted any interest at all, which is always interesting in a property show but especially during a credit crunch, even if all these regions had somehow "largely" avoided it.

But then, about halfway through, the format seemed to abandon the thought that anyone might buy the featured houses (perhaps it's that credit crunch) and settled for voyeuristic property porn. For, even though Five's marketing describes its viewers as "aspirational", would there really be anyone tuning in who could actually bid for the £4.5m mansions in Sandbanks, Dorset?

Yet, even as a housing programme for voyeurs, *The Property List* had been unlucky with its timing: Piers Moron had already slavered round the same places in an ITV1 doc on Sandbanks.

Presentationally, there were the usual TV tics, such as cannibalistic references to the medium itself. A Scottish resort was commended because it was "where Hamish Macbeth was filmed", while the Cornish contender had been "the setting for the popular series *Poldark*." And couples were always interviewed holding hands or with arms around each other, which is fairly rare in real-life conversations after college, but which telly producers use to achieve cheap sentimentality and underscore the corny voiceover about "Peter and Marie leaving the London rat-race to live the dream".

And, as often in telly, the producers seemed sweetly naive about the impact that their series might have on what they were depicting. Plockton in Scotland is "one of Britain's best-kept secrets." Well, less so now, perhaps.

The local bobby in Buddleigh Salterton boasted that his patch had one of the lowest crime-rates in Britain: only 105 offences in the whole of last year. Yeah, and let's hope that statistic survives the influx of Five-viewing chavs.

"Coming up: *House*," said the continuity announcer at the end. But going down: houses. For all the producers' desperate attempts to make the best of a bad job, this was a really bad job. It would never have been a great series, but the timing knackered it. Five's audience now eagerly await a guide to investment sponsored by the Bradford & Bingley or the documentary Gordon Brown: Political Giant.

'Remote Controller'

MEDIA NEWS

IF Simon Cowell was irritated that a dancer, 14-year-old George Sampson, won *Britain's Got Talent*, depriving him of the chance to profit from a record deal via his company Sony BMG, he hid his disappointment well.

"We will be talking to Andrew, Faryl and Escala at some point this week," Cowell said after the musical acts in question had been eliminated in the final episode. "Our priority is, of course, the winner. We put all we have behind him."

Sampson's victory, however, was very good news for the dance act Mint Royale, who saw their first ever number one thanks to download sales of their remix of *Singin' in the Rain*, which Sampson used as his backing track. The young breakdancer adopted the song at the semi-final stage, replacing his audition piece, C&C Music Factory's *Gonna Make You Sweat*.

And which record company is behind *Singin' in the Rain*? Er, Sony BMG.

THE BBC's decision to axe *What The Papers Say*, produced for the past nine years by ITV Productions for BBC2, was made by a commissioning panel that concluded: "The media environment has changed dramatically and so has the way our audience consumes the news," adding: "We already provide this service to our audience through many BBC outlets."

The media environment has indeed changed rapidly at the BBC's "many" outlets. The papers are covered briefly on BBC News 24 during the graveyard shift. Elsewhere, various front pages are held up to the camera by *Breakfast* and *Newsnight* presenters desperate to fill airtime. And BBC Online offers a five-paragraph summary of the day's papers. But there's no link to it on the main page and when you do find it, it turns out to be four months old.

WHAT was the BBC web team doing as news emerged that it had gone £36m over-budget? Er, enjoying an "evening of celebration" at the O2 Arena, of course!

With impeccable timing, Tuesday 3 June saw the first get-together and "fun day" for staff in the BBC's Future Media & Technology department, hitherto scattered across the country as part of the corporation's much-vaunted commitment to the regions.

"For the first time ever, we're getting the whole of FM&T together under one roof," announced Keith Wilson from HR in an email to all 1,800 staff in April.

By the end of the month, after a large proportion of recipients – at least 120 of whom face redundancy – found themselves unavoidably committed to washing their hair on party day, things had turned less lovable.

"This is your event and attendance is mandatory unless you have discussed with your line manager and are unable to attend due to operational or personal reasons," snapped FM&T director Ashley Highfield, himself departing next month (for a job with a broadband TV provider, rather than the dole queue).

If this was not persuasive enough, he went on to detail how "we shall be sharing our Vision and Strategy… This will be followed by an evening of celebration, starting with an awards ceremony… and closing with a party at a surprise venue within the O2 until 10pm. This is set to be an informative, celebratory and fun day."

Or, as one attendee described it, "a slide show of sound-bites, dodgy films of questionable quality, lots of self-congratulatory back-slapping for the chosen ones, and a disco in the evening".

BBC | Trust
OF COURSE JONATHAN ROSS'S SALARY IS OBSCENE. IT HAS TO MATCH HIS MATERIAL.
SURELY "MATCH THE GOING RATE IN THE MARKET", SIR?
SIR MICHAEL LYONS

BIRTSPEAK 2.0

"We engaged with external stakeholders – most importantly licence fee payers via public consultation, audience research and collaboration with the BBC's Audience Councils. We also engaged with other operators in online markets to understand any potential negative market impact which might affect public value in aggregate, and with other organisations with an interest in the BBC's online activities… Overall, we believe that bbc.co.uk performs very well against all of these drivers… Quality metrics demonstrate that approval and other perceptions of bbc.co.uk are high."

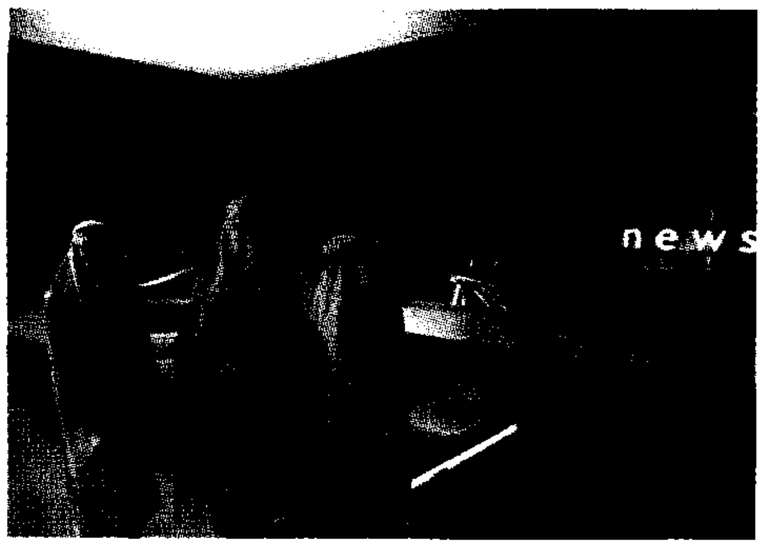
– BBC Trust report on the BBC website

Mr Forbes told BBC Scotland: "Tombstoning is incredibly stupid and dangerous. And posting it on the internet is also incredibly stupid.

Watch **Tombstoning video**

BBC news website

New Modest Look For Newsnight Girls



***(l-r)* Kirsty Wark, Emily Maitlis, Stephanie Flanders**

DUMB BRITAIN

talkSPORT

Mike Parry: What name does Cat Stevens go under now? I'll give you a clue, he converted to Isl... er, he became a Muslim...

Caller: Abu Hamza?

The Weakest Link WAG Special, BBC1

Anne Robinson: What "E" is a mountain in the Himalayas, peaking at over 29,000 feet?

WAG: Er, er, I'll have to guess. Is it oxygen?

Are You Smarter Than A 10-Year-Old?, Sky One

Presenter: According to the Old Testament, on which mountain did Moses receive the Ten Commandments?

Contestant: Ah, I think I know this one. Something tells me it's Mount Rushmore.

Presenter: Was the Tyrannosaurus Rex a carnivore or a herbivore?

Contestant: No, it was a "dinosore".

THE BBC Trust, grovelling yet again to Ofcom, has endorsed new production targets that will force the BBC to make at least 50 percent of its programmes outside London by 2016.

This is an almost impossible feat for the BBC to achieve. Production facilities for programmes currently made in London will have to be relocated and staff made redundant. This will require yet more of a licence fee that will have been shrinking year on year very nicely even without this extra pressure.

LUVVIES

"I hope I can have as many great roles in my career as Judi Dench has had since she was 40. There are other women I'm inspired by: Meryl Streep, Kirsty Wark, Jenni Murray. And I can't say Penelope Wilton without a tingle going down my spine."

ANNE-MARIE DUFF
Guardian

Submitted by S.F.

THE BBC's disastrous decision to outsource its human resources unit to Crapita continues to dismay staff who used to rely on the confidentiality of the service once provided by the BBC itself.

An investigation is under way following the leaking of staff salary details by Crapita to "a wider group of people than was necessary".

This follows revelations in the *Eye*, hotly denied by the BBC at the time, that confidential health details appeared to be similarly lacking in confidentiality.

The unions have had enough and are demanding that Crapita lose its contract after "one calamity after another", in the finest traditions of Crapita.

Luckily, BBC managers were quick to reassure Crapita representatives at a recent management brainstorm that such an option was out of the question, thanks to the punitive costs of releasing Crapita and returning to the in-house system.

AD NAUSEAM

IN THE very near future the 30-second commercial break, which has defined the advertising industry for the past 50 years, will be gone. The advent of personal video recorders and the internet, coupled with a collective fatigue in the face of relentless marketing drivel, has meant we either switch off or fast-forward.

The Thursday before last gave us a glimpse of what might replace it, when Honda screened a live ad on Channel 4. In it, 19 freefalling skydivers spelt out the word "Honda", which, one assumes, was meant to be in the spirit of Honda's new strapline "Difficult is worth doing". There was no proof the ad was live – it had "Live ad from Spain" in the top corner – but that hardly clinches it in a year when UK television channels retain about as much public trust as loan sharks – and we do not know just how "difficult" this stunt was, nor why it was "worth doing".

Regardless, it was the idea of a one-off, event ad that was meant to be the talking point. Honda certainly made the most of it, trailing the spot for weeks beforehand, setting up a website documenting the whole production and issuing press releases claiming this was "creating history".

VIRGIN Radio chose the spring bank holiday to go "advert-free".

Unfortunately, Virgin's idea of what constitutes an advert appears to differ from everyone else's, as instead of interrupting music with ads they did it with continual announcements saying they were "advert-free all day… courtesy of Magners Irish Cider".

NEW London mayor Boris Johnson has tried to put himself in the frontline of the battle against gun and knife crime in the capital.

Perhaps he should start by speaking to the ad sellers working for Transport for London. For had Johnson nipped up the Bakerloo line to Embankment tube, he would have seen posters for Chris Ryan's new page-turner *Strike Back* that have been all over London.

Their message? "Chris Ryan's Rules of Engagement: THEY bring a Knife. YOU bring a gun. THEY bring a gun. YOU bring an M16, 5.56mm Caliber, air-cooled, gas-operated, machine-fed rifle with optical sights..."

PRODUCT placement is strictly frowned on by BBC rules. But companies supplying props to the BBC are not only in the business of pushing branded merchandise on prime-time TV – they're boasting about it.

The corporation's editorial guidelines state that lifestyle shows "may occasionally accept free or reduced-cost products or services", but the BBC must "inform suppliers that they cannot refer to the BBC's use of their products or services in any advertising or promotions".

Prop company 1st Place, which calls itself "the UK's leading product placement agency" and enjoys BBC "preferred supplier" status, doesn't seem to have got the message, as its website proudly bragged of having placed an Ikea kitchen on *DIY SOS* last year. An invoice seen by the *Eye* charged the BBC £1 and said baldly: "For product placement". The taps alone cost £60 in store.

There are other companies jostling to get branded products on screen and, far from avoiding referring to the BBC's custom, they can't do it often enough. Seesaw Media boasts of supplying *Hustle* with Moët champagne; and Production Profiles proudly reveals that it got Peugeot on to *Spooks*.

A BBC spokeswoman said discounted props should only be used "where there's a clear editorial justification". With the BBC under pressure to slash budgets, it looks like boom time for 1st Place and their ilk.

PS. Soon after the *Eye* spoke to the BBC, 1st Place removed photos of the Ikea kitchen from its website.

CELEBRATIONS at the *Lancet* and other medical and scientific journals published by Reed Elsevier, as the publishing and events giant finally divested itself of the DSEi, ITEC and LAAD arms fairs last month.

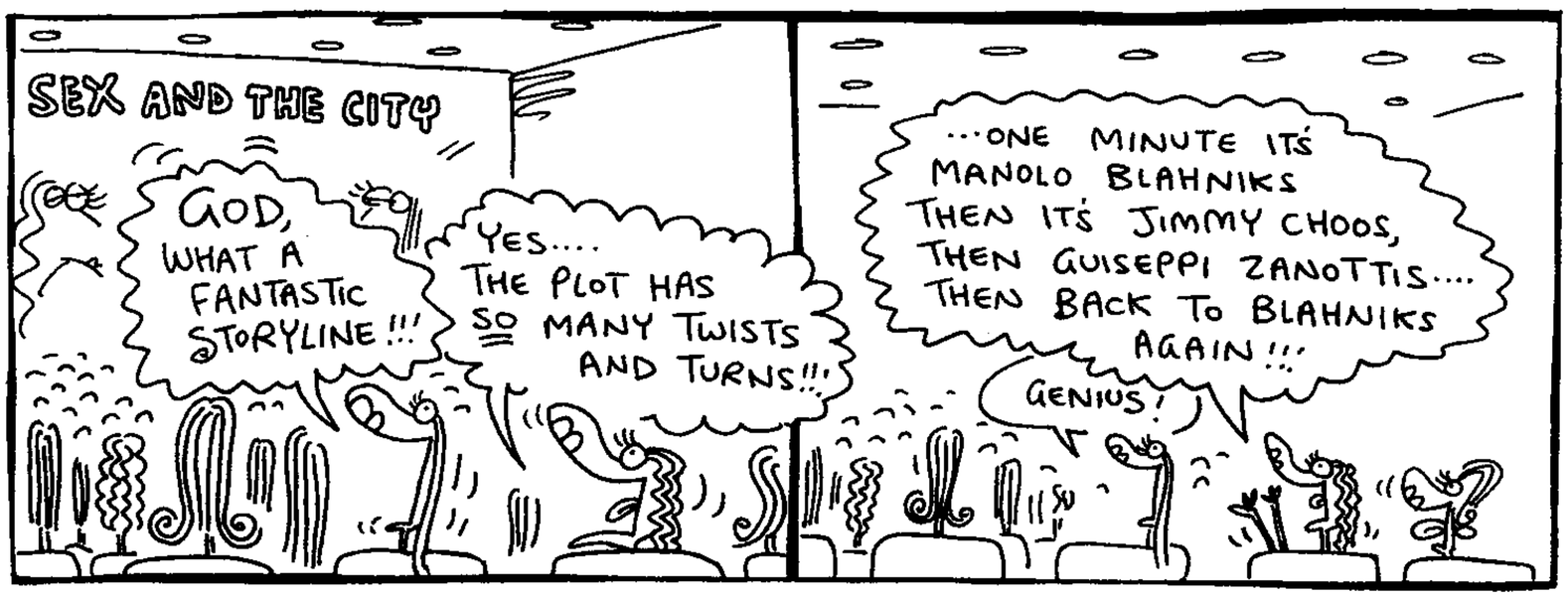
"It will be incomprehensible to the journal's readers that our owners are engaged in a business that clearly undermines principles of public-health practice," the *Lancet* announced in an editorial which prompted a revolt by arms campaigners and, more importantly, shareholders. "The company should divest itself of all business interests that threaten human, and especially civilian, health and well- being."

And so it came to pass. But who is the new owner of the world's biggest guns 'n' bombs fests?

Step forward Clarion Events, previously known for hosting The Baby Shows, "a great day out with the chance to try and buy all the essentials you need to give you baby the best start in life".

SUPERMODELS

KERBER


SEX AND THE CITY
GOD, WHAT A FANTASTIC STORYLINE!!!
YES.... THE PLOT HAS SO MANY TWISTS AND TURNS!!!
...ONE MINUTE ITS MANOLO BLAHNIKS THEN ITS JIMMY CHOOS, THEN GUISEPPI ZANOTTIS.... THEN BACK TO BLAHNIKS AGAIN!!!
GENIUS!

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

SHEFFIELD OF DREAMS

YET another financial scandal emerges at Sheffield city council (*Eyes passim*). Financial controls on a £55m "new deal for communities" (NDC) regeneration project have been woefully inadequate, according to an auditor's report.

The NDC scheme in the deprived district of Burngreave employed one Bill Husband as its interim deputy director last year on the equivalent of £110,000 per annum... despite the fact that he had previously been sacked for gross misconduct from a similar scheme in London.

In 2006, while deputy chief executive of South Kilburn NDC, he and chief executive Jack Davies lived rent-free in a bungalow Brent council had loaned the project, supposedly for use as offices. Husband was fired and Davies resigned.

Despite being aware of this background the Sheffield scheme's chief executive, John Clark, recommended Husband's appointment as his interim deputy. Clark told the city council's investigation that he knew both men had been suspended but thought they had resigned because of a spat between Brent and the South Kilburn NDC.

No reference was taken up, although testimonies were taken from the website of a "training" company, the JMJ Group... of which Husband and Davies were directors. Burngreave NDC subsequently awarded contracts worth at least £110,000 to JMJ, not all of which went through proper tendering processes. Of this, £55,818 was in respect of four individual contracts for training, or similar services, and £55,300 to pay for Husband's six-month contract.

Sheffield's new Lib Dem leader Paul Scriven has called on New Deal chief exec Clark to resign. It's all rather embarrassing for the Labour group's deputy leader, Steve Jones, as he happens to represent Burngreave and all this was taking place on his watch while he was the council's deputy leader.

● SO. FAREWELL then Steve Farnsworth, Westminster council's director of schools, who had a leaving bash with colleagues at the end of last month. Mr Farnsworth was popular with the council's Tory leadership, headed by Shirley Porter protégée Sir Simon Milton, as he pushed through their agenda to close "liberal" Pimlico comprehensive school against the wishes of most parents and teachers, and replace it with a city academy run by Future, a charity founded by John Nash, major Tory donor and chairman of venture capital outfit Sovereign. The academy will inherit new school buildings constructed with £35m of taxpayers' money under the Building Schools for the Future programme. At his leaving do Farnsworth was presented with a piece of demolition rubble from the old school. No crude ideological triumphalism there, then.

SAND IN THE EYE

IN March *Eye* 1206 reported the outrage of locals after Surrey county council's planning committee approved an application from Tarmac plc to build a mortar processing plant more than 110ft tall at a quarry at Bletchingley, near Godstone.

As we reported, councillors actually voted narrowly *against* the scheme, but dim-witted Tory planning chair Pat Frost miscounted the vote as a draw and then used her casting vote in favour of it. At the time Surrey's lawyers said nothing could be done; but following a legal challenge by locals the council reconsidered and on 28 May councillors threw out the application 11 - 4.

Now residents want their district council to take seriously complaints about dust pollution from the quarry, run by operators WBB. Tandridge council's environmental health supremo Robert Muir recently wrote to one resident: "While... there have been incidents of dust complaints, nationwide, due to fine Saharan sand, we are not aware of recent problems in Godstone with the heavier sand from the quarry."

Our picture shows the quarry in question – clearly not polluting the surrounding area in the

slightest. And is that a party of Bedouin emerging from the haze?

NUCLEAR WASTE

CAPITA really is taking the piss out of the Tory/Lib Deb coalition which controls Cumbria county council.

Eye 1211 reported how the ubiquitous outsourcing firm had won a lucrative contract from the council in 2001 by promising to create 1,000 sorely-needed jobs within five years. Crapita promised to pay a penalty of £1,000 for every job short of the 1,000 promised. When it duly failed, the council generously extended the contract for three years. Next year, on the assumption 650 jobs in all will be created, the council will accept £350,000 compensation. But the current true "new jobs" figure, claimed to be 575, is actually still less than 400, the *Eye* has learned. Some 190 of Capita's "new" jobs are in fact existing staff who handle payroll matters at the Sellafield nuclear plant. Their jobs were "outsourced" last year by the British Nuclear Group to Capita, but it's the same people doing the same jobs at the same desks in the same offices they have worked in for years, now claimed as "new" jobs by Crapita. So that's what they mean by nuclear re-processing!

● SOUTHWARK'S ruling Lib Dem/Tory administration has been cutting spending this year, closing the Livesey children's museum and hiking the price of meals on wheels. Happily the council could still afford last month for leader Nick Stanton, deputy Kim Humphreys and Tory councillor Toby Eckersley to host a champagne reception at sarf London's "unique wine tasting attraction and stunning conference and events venue", Vinopolis, to "foster good partnerships and joint working" with Southwark's newly-appointed waste contractor, Veolia. The bill for 60 guests was £6,000, picked up by the generous council taxpayer. Trebles all round!

NEATH CONTEMPT

LABOUR'S Neath Port Talbot council (NPT) is pursuing a penniless pensioner for £42,000 after she failed in a legal bid to stop National Grid (NG) building a gas pressure reduction station in the village of Cilfrew.

Linda Ware, 68, sought a judicial review into how councillors voted when giving NG planning permission for its controversial installation, part of a £750m gas pipeline across Wales, which many villagers fear could be a safety hazard (*Eyes passim*).

Mrs Ware, recently elected a Plaid Cymru community councillor, initially won legal aid for her battle. She also won her argument in the high court, where she claimed there were procedural irregularities in the committee vote after NG's application squeezed through 13-12. Four ratepayer members expected to oppose it left before a vote was taken when council officials warned them they could be viewed as having "prejudged" the matter (*Eye* 1171). But the appeal court ruled against Mrs Ware and the council is now chasing her for its costs because, unknown to her, legal aid lapsed during the prolonged court process.

Council taxpayers' money is being spent chasing a debt NPT has no chance of recovering: Mrs Ware is a tenant with negligible savings. If she were declared bankrupt, however, she would be unable to stand in future as a councillor or Welsh assembly member. She is seeking an explanation from the supreme court costs office as to how her legal aid lapsed and is preparing to fight the order.

Derek Davies, NPT's director of finance, said: "I have a personal fiduciary duty on behalf of our council taxpayers to collect all sums due to the council. An order for costs has been made... by the court of appeal. Any recovery action will be professionally based and in accordance with the council's normal debt recovery processes."

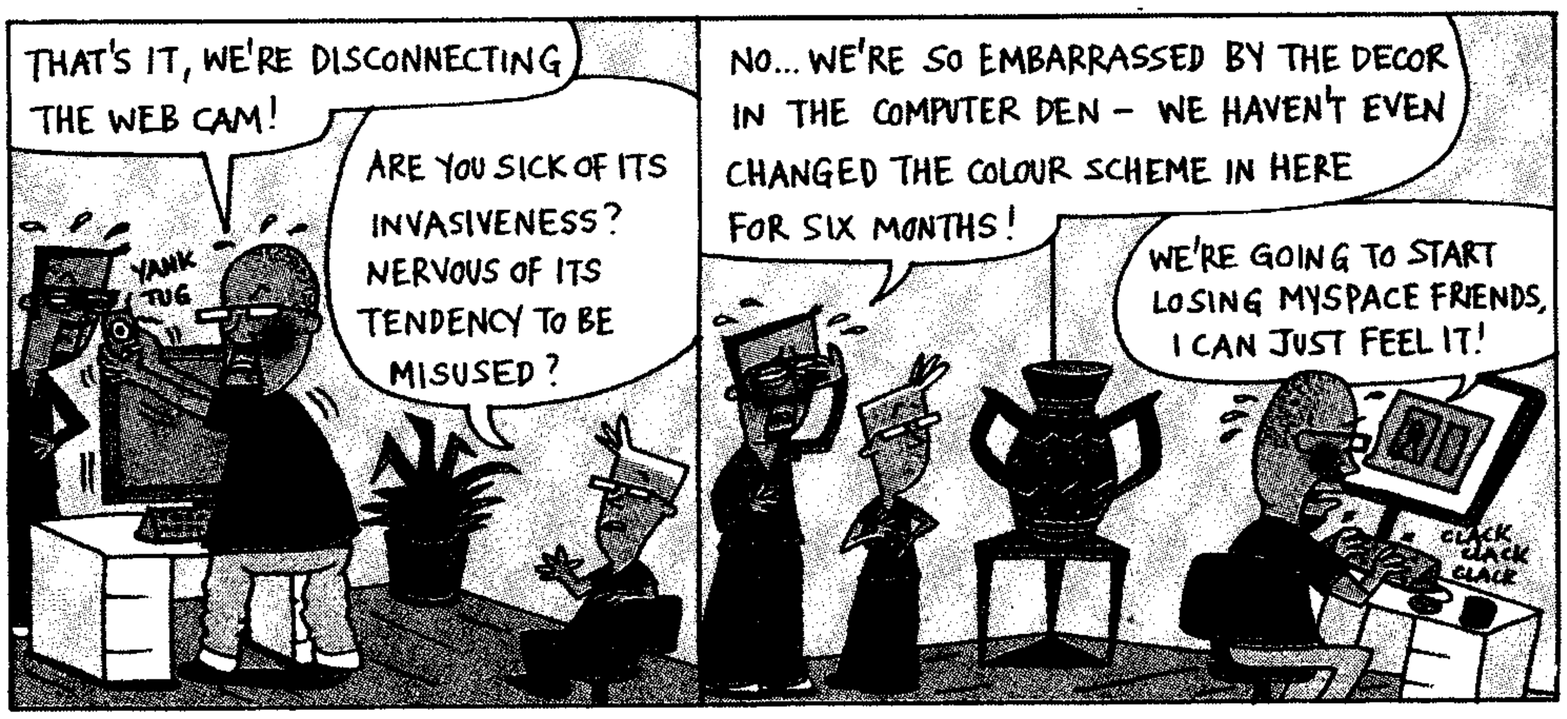
OMOLE IN A HOLE

INSPECTOR Knacker has been asked to investigate alleged "financial irregularities" in the IT department at Forest of Dean council, Gloucestershire. The inquiry is believed to centre on invoices totalling £10,000 for which no record of services provided can be found.

Knacker may wish to speak to the council's former interim IT chief, Dr Charles Omole, who is now in a similar role at the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) in London. Dr Omole was interviewed for this job by Kamal Ahmed, the EHRC's communications supremo, formerly of the *Observer*. Ahmed told the *Eye*: "Charles came to us with exemplary references from Forest of Dean and is doing an excellent job here. Neither he nor we have any idea what this is about because neither the council nor the police have contacted us so far." Outside work, Dr Omole is founder of the Winning Faith Bible Church and the author of a number of religious works, including *Secrets of Biblical Wealth Transfer* and *Prosperity Unleashed*. Praise the Lord!

● OUR item about Slough in the last issue said the leader of the Tory group on the council was Cllr Diana Coad. In fact that honour currently falls to one Derek Cryer. "Lady" Diana, who is also the party's parliamentary candidate for the town, merely behaves as if she is leader. Apologies to the invisible man.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER


THAT'S IT, WE'RE DISCONNECTING THE WEB CAM!
YANK TUG
ARE YOU SICK OF ITS INVASIVENESS? NERVOUS OF ITS TENDENCY TO BE MISUSED?
NO... WE'RE SO EMBARRASSED BY THE DECOR IN THE COMPUTER DEN - WE HAVEN'T EVEN CHANGED THE COLOUR SCHEME IN HERE FOR SIX MONTHS!
WE'RE GOING TO START LOSING MYSPACE FRIENDS, I CAN JUST FEEL IT!
CLACK CLACK CLACK

NOOKS and CORNERS

ALAS I must return to the European Capital of Culture for 2008, especially as Nigel Lee, Planning Manager of Regeneration in Liverpool, circulated an "open letter" in response to my strictures in *Eye* 1207 – an abbreviated version of which was published in *Eye* 1209.

The tone of Mr Lee's letter suggests Liverpool city council is somewhat rattled. As well it might be: a recent BBC *File on 4* report on the Capital of Culture reminded us that the Audit Commission considers those in charge to be "the worst performing council in the country", that the cultural programme has been characterised by resignations, cancellations and overspending, and that the district auditor, in addition to warning about the lack of financial accountability, has talked of "intimidation" at council meetings.

Mr Lee wrote that "conservation should not be seen as preventing new building and I am not sure why ['Piloti'] decries development in our city". I do, because so much of it is mediocre, overweening and destructive to the very fabric and streetscape which make part of the city a World Heritage Site. In its puffs, the Liverpool Culture Company – set up by the council to "deliver the culture programme" – says that "Liverpool boasts more Grade I and II listed buildings than any other British city after London. It also has some of the finest modern architecture in Europe". The latter claim is rubbish. There is not a single new building *of* any real distinction – and whether the new Museum of Liverpool will be any good, following dismissal of its Danish architects and rows about the cladding (*Eyes passim*), remains to be seen. What is certain is that the steady attrition of Liverpool's historic buildings is continuing – many being replaced by tall banal blocks of yuppie flats which promise to remain empty when the Year of Culture is over.

Preserving Liverpool's Georgian heritage?

Mr Lee thinks I do not know what is really going on in Liverpool. Someone who does is the heroic Florence Gersten of the Save Our City Campaign, who has been battling for the last 35 years against the vandals, spivs and incompetents who have so spoiled Liverpool. In response to Nigel Lee's open letter, she writes that while the monumental buildings like the Albert Dock are now given adequate protection, "The same cannot be said for our smaller Georgian buildings, especially those which are neither listed nor within conservation areas. Until recently these were visible in almost every street in the centre of Liverpool. They are now disappearing so quickly that there will soon be nothing to show the 18th century origins of most of these streets". The promotional literature claims the city has some of the finest Georgian architecture outside London – well it did, but the council has allowed more than half Liverpool's Georgian architecture to disappear since the Second World War).

"Despite what Mr Lee states…", continues Miss Gersten, "location within a conservation area does not always give a building the protection one might expect. Some have been totally demolished, including the Victorian… 6 Sir Thomas Street and the Georgian Jamaica House, both of which were situated within the Liverpool World Heritage Site, as well as the Castle Street Conservation Area. In other cases whole rows of Georgian buildings, many of them listed and all within conservation areas, have been preserved at the expense of having their rear elevations and outriggers demolished and replaced by uncompromisingly contemporary structures… Unfortunately the Historic Environment of Liverpool Project, known as HELP, has not seen fit to prevent any of these occurrences".

The council's attitude to historic buildings could be seen after Selhurst Estates wrote to the planning department on 24 January asking for information about any churches or chapels in the city threatened with redundancy and demolition which might be purchased by a client.

Liverpool is full of ailing or redundant "ecclesiastical plant", much of it listed, and here was a chance to secure the future of one of them, yet no reply was received – nor to two subsequent letters. A fourth letter, sent on 6 May, elicited a brush-off by email from Steve Corbett, "Conservation Team Leader", offering no advice or information.

Selhurst Estates was in fact acting for a religious charity, the Society of St Pius X. This may well be a reactionary sect, heartily disapproved of by the Roman Catholic hierarchy, but it has worked with English Heritage in restoring three listed churches elsewhere and has rescued other redundant religious buildings.

Although the Society uses churches for the purposes for which they were designed and carefully restores the interiors, it is clearly not wanted in Liverpool. Yet there is a church which would have been perfect for it: the former Franciscan church of St Mary of the Angels in Everton, a grade II-listed building full of remarkable Renaissance treasures given by the shipping heiress Amy Imrie (*Eyes* 1158 & 1053).

But as it had been closed by the Archdiocese of Liverpool (which has recently demolished two Victorian churches in the city, despite protests), the council planning committee preferred to give planning permission for a scheme to convert it into rehearsal space for the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. This involves removing the fittings and drilling holes for equipment into floors and ceiling: in other words, ruining it.

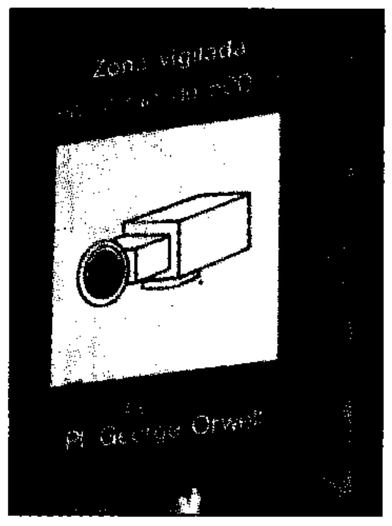
Such is Culture in Liverpool.

'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

Hell remade as Fucking Hell, defaced oil paintings and Hitler watercolours...
JAKE AND DINOS CHAPMAN
IF HITLER HAD BEEN A HIPPY HOW HAPPY WOULD WE BE.
They're definitely mellowing!
Ah well, it happens to us all...
WHITE CUBE



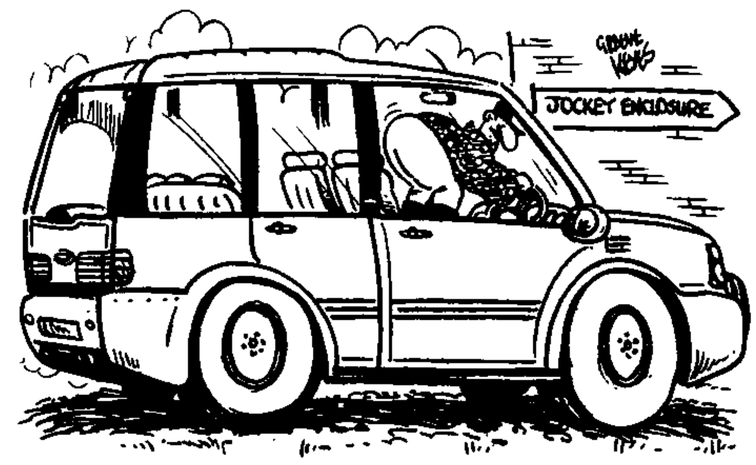
I-SPY

Barcelona

Submitted by James Radford.

£10 paid for similar submissions.

(SAE required for return of photographs)



MUSIC & MUSICIANS

THAT politicians rush to the support of tabloid "issues" for the sake of a few column inches or two minutes on the *Today* programme is something we've grown used to. But when musicians do it to fill otherwise empty seats at their concerts, it's a mark of desperation.

You'd be hard put to find a more desperate figure these days than Michael Nyman, who's spent the past weeks rummaging like a tramp in a waste bin for anything he could find to plug the not so hot-ticket festival of his own music that ran last weekend [6-8 Jun] at London's Cadogan Hall.

Nyman, you may remember, got famous a long time ago for writing the scores to Peter Greenaway's films but has been complaining ever since that no one takes him seriously as a composer.

In recent years his only claim to prominence has been as the stooge of kiss-and-tell stories fed into the press by an angry girlfriend who decided to share details of his unpleasant habits. And when it came to selling this three-day festival of himself at the Cadogan, it seems tickets weren't moving with the speed of light.

So, at the command of the maestro, out came a press statement from his PR company, "Composer Michael Nyman Speaks Out Against Knife Crime", announcing that the festival would include a specially arranged piece in memory of a young stabbing victim. What's more, it would play alongside a piece called *Memorial*, dedicated to the football fans who died in the 1985 Heysel Stadium disaster.

Sadly, this heartwarming testament to artistic compassion didn't make the front pages or shift many seats. So a few days later, out came another release, "Michael Nyman Supports the Pensioners Parliament", announcing that his concern for the plight of this country's elderly had moved him to write a new piece, *Battle for the Old Age Pension,* which would of course be heard at his Cadogan Hall weekend.

When this, too, failed to prompt mass outpourings of joy and wonder, we got yet another press release – to say that Peter Moore, the cute 12-year-old trombonist who had just won BBC Young Musician of the Year, had been drafted into Nyman's weekend. What this did for ticket sales I don't know. But how wonderful that the social concern of Mr Nyman is so all-encompassing, from crime victims and hard-up OAPs to long-dead football fans and the encouragement of tender talent.

What he obviously deserves now isn't just a Prom. Let's hear it for a knighthood. Or a Nobel prize.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

Letters

Correct diagnosis

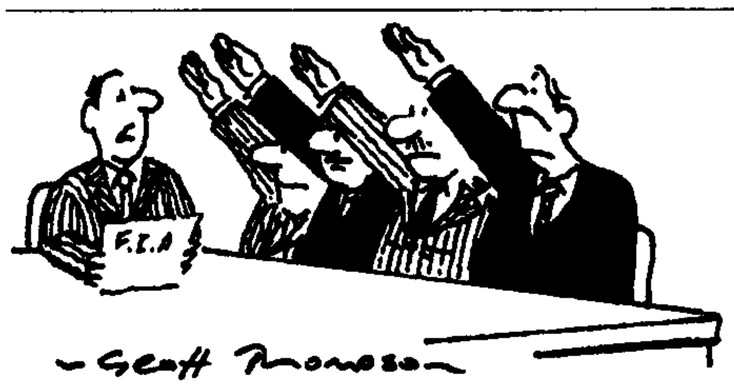
Sir,

Your correspondent David Worskett (Eye 1211) is being disingenuous when he defends Independent Treatment Centres (ITCs) in the wake of MD's article about the poor outcome of operations performed in Weston (highlighted in research done by my colleague Mark Forster and others). Weston may have been an NHS-run facility but it was operated entirely along ITC lines, with itinerant surgical teams, in this case Scandinavian, coming and going and not able to offer any continuity or accountability. The recruitment of patients, taking everyone else's overspill and charging through the nose for it, was also along ITC lines. As we now all know, the ITCs were given ridiculously generous contracts that saw them in profit whether or not they treated the requisite number of patients.

The so-called patient outcomes he refers to are in fact patient satisfaction surveys, and not measures of surgical success or quality. As we found when we had to manage the many malfunctioning knee replacements coming out of Weston, the patients had been very happy with the facilities, waiting times and also the staff in the centres. After all, they had time and money with which to play, and the staff were undoubtedly nice and charming. The problems came when operations went pear-shaped, the operating surgeon had gone back to the home country and the "contracted activity" was over, and no further treatment could be offered. In those (many) cases, the local NHS facility was left to pick up the pieces.

So MD has no need to return to medical school, as suggested by Mr Worskett, as the original diagnosis was correct. Instead, Mr Worskett ought to tag along to the "Evidence Based Diagnosis" lecture and listen to the bits on how you can't pick and choose your evidence to suit yourself.

Regards,
CHRIS WILSON,
Orthopaedic Surgeon, Cardiff.



"All those in favour of Max Mosley staying on..."

Incorrect diagnosis

Sir,

David Worskett (Letters, Eye 1211) excoriates MD for his lack of "accurate, evidence based diagnosis" of the NHS's problems, citing "the latest study carried out by the highly respected BMC Health Services Research organisation".

BMC Health Services Research is, er, a journal, and while they publish plenty of research, I'm not aware of them actually carrying any out themselves. Credit where credit's due and all that. Perhaps if Directors of important-sounding organisations like the NHS Partner Network were aware of such distinctions – and heaven forbid, read research articles occasionally – the Service would be in a slightly healthier state.

Yours etc.,
DR ANDREW CLEGG
(not a medic),
Stoke Newington, London.

To Russia, with love

Sir,

With all the dross on TV at the moment to choose from, why pick on Dimbleby's not bad series travelling through Russia? Not every show has to be about politics. This programme tells you far more about everyday life in today's Russia than could any expose about the not exactly closet-case megalomaniacs in the Kremlin. The drinks party conversation in which middle class Russians revealed themselves to be unconcerned about democracy is actually very telling, while in another scene filmed in front of a shrine to Stalin, Dimbleby patiently hears a Stalingrad resident's adoring tributes to Uncle Joe, before insisting that the dictator was in fact a mass-murderer and a monster.

So give the guy a break.

CATHY COOPER,
London.

Lookalike

Presenter

Oil painting?

Sir,

While perusing the fine art of Dame Beryl Cook, my eyes were drawn to this detail [of a waiter in her 'Cafe Tortini']. Has one of our most illustrious syrupy-voiced broadcasting knights been reduced to serving lager to supplement his meagre Beeb income? Perhaps we could start a fundraising Telethon to help?

PETER OLIVER
Via email.

Grain of sympathy

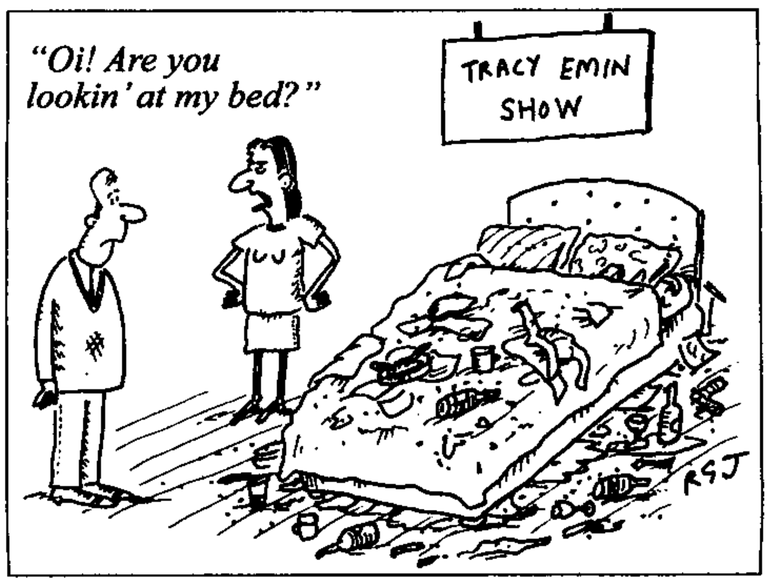
Sir,

Whilst agreeing with the general thrust of Muckspreader's comments on the EU's management of grain stocks (Eye 1210), I find myself rather alarmingly being forced to defend them. Firstly, they did not sell off intervention stocks at knock-down prices, but rather used them to stave off the first rumblings of the impending shortages at what were then historically high prices, which, at the time, was applauded as a responsible use of those 'grain mountains'. Secondly, even this last year the EU was a net exporter of wheat, by some three to four million tonnes, with an anticipated return to a more usual eight million tonnes for the coming harvest.

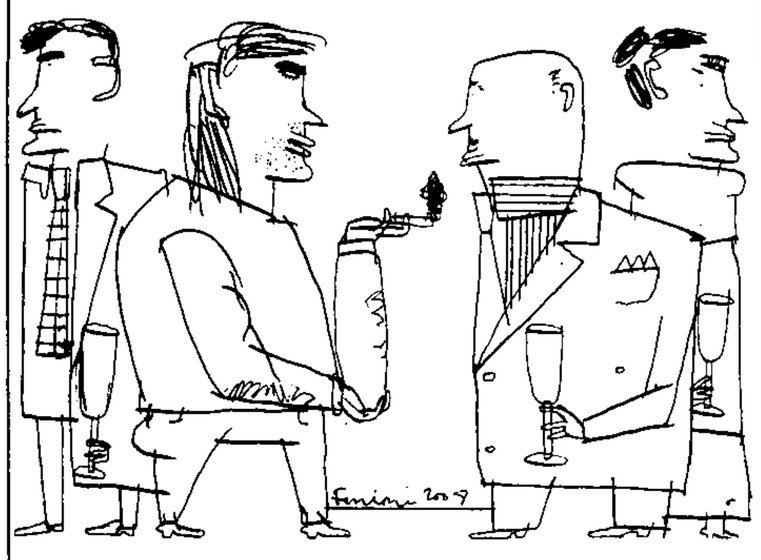
Incidentally, I have found the answer to the thorny problem of where to put the apostrophe in P'edant's' Corner – simply modernise the whole concept by naming it Pedant Solutions.

Yours not needing a subscription now that the Co-op in Selsey stock it regularly,

ANDREW HOUSE,
Via email.



Scenes You Seldom See



"Me? I'm an actor. But what do you *do?"*

Must try harder

Sir,

Re Educashun Newz (Eye 1210).

You back teachers who have "rubbished" plans to "force" schools to record teenage pregnancies, drug use and obesity, asking "what's the point of keeping statistical records of problems if there's no-one in school trained to improve the situation?"

That **is** *the point. I sit on two of the three bodies in Newham to which the Sex and Relationships team – an outside body not attached to any particular school that gives them sex education classes – reports to. These are the Statutory Advisory Council on Religious Education and the Children and Young Peoples' Scrutiny Commission, the other body being the Social Services Department.*

Newham has the worst rate of unwanted teenage pregnancy in Britain, and, given a comparison between Britain and the rest of the EU, we probably hold the European record too. We are desperate to reduce this as much as possible, but the problem is that while we know the rate for the Borough, we can't find out easily which schools are the worst – except through rumour.

If we knew that a particular school, perhaps even a particular year within a school, had an especially high rate of teenage pregnancy, it would indicate to us where the Sex and Relationships team should concentrate. Similarly, if use of a particular drug was especially prevalent at a particular school, it could indicate to police that an unscrupulous drug dealer needed to be tracked down. If obesity rates were high, investigations into school meals – and local fast food joints – could help the situation, as could a review of what information on diet the school provided.

STEVE WILSON,
London E6.

Present tense

Sir,

I am very disappointed with the level of debate on your letters page concerning the historical descriptions of Our Melvin.

Barg is simply making use of the "dramatic present" or "historical present," a rhetorical device the use of which stretches back at least as far as the days of ancient Rome. The Eye's editorial board will be very familiar with it, from their schooldays translating Caesar's Gallic Wars.

It's also a device used to great effect by Cicero. Though whether M. Barg deserves to be compared to a provincial windbag notorious for social climbing like Marcus Tullius is another matter.

Kind regards,
JAMES MACKAY
(A-Level Latin [failed]),
Larnaca, Cyprus.

Olympic spoils sport

Sir,

Ad Nauseam (Eye 1210) queries what will happen in the lead-up to London 2012 to protect the Olympic sponsors. Based on the Sydney 2000 experience you will get an Olympic Act that will protect every imaginable interest of the IOC including a suspension of your competition law so that they can require that all credit card payments will have to be on Visa. Mastercard won't buy you an Olympic ticket!

Good luck
JOHN WOOD,

Via email.

Fair cop

Sir,

Shame on Peterborough Councilor Wayne Fitzgerald, who drives a 23-mpg BMW X5 (Eye 1211, 30 May)! He should, of course, be driving a 17.5-mpg Range Rover as advertised in the Eye on pp. 32-33 of the same issue.

HENRY MERRITT,

Via email.

Lookalike

Oil painting?

Presenter

Sir,

I couldn't help noticing the similarity between oil painting Davina and Lorenzo Lotto's 'Portrait of a Woman Inspired by Lucretia'. Maybe something in the breeding, or perhaps a clue to the next presenting job after BB?

DES CUSTARD,

Tunbridge Wells..

Plane, stupid

Sir,

*Yesterday I sadly had no choice but to drive to Harrogate from Kent, stopping en route to fill up with petrol. The fill-up cost me £80. Today I note that with one of the budget airlines 5 people could fly to Hungary, **and** get a round of beers in, for the same price.*

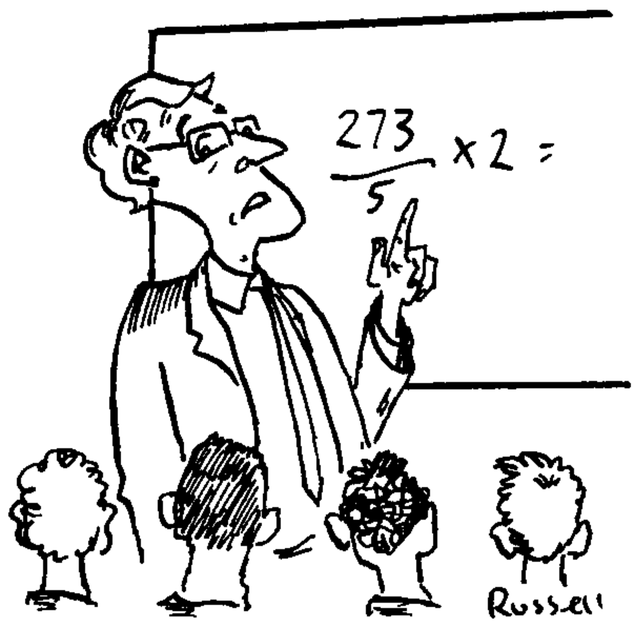
The answer is staring me in the face: I'm trading in my Renault Laguna for a Boeing 737.

Yours,
NICK CARTER,

Ashford, Kent.

GATESHEAD police yesterday warned people riding motorcycles or quad bikes illegally will be seized, crushed and recycled.

Newcastle Journal



"Any of you care to have a stab at... er... take a shot at... er... make a guess?"

Jesus saves?

Sir,

With reference to Dr. B. Ching's last paragraph criticising Brian Souter (Eye 1211): Jesus never condemned anyone who got rich through honest trade or labour. The "Sell all you have" comment was directed at a young man who thought his observance of the Ten Commandments would earn him acceptance with God, but actually valued his wealth and position in life more than God's approval, and it served to expose his attitude. Unless Dr Ching has insight akin to that of Our Lord I suggest it is inappropriate for him to use the quote to bash Mr Souter.

Yours,
PHIL ROWLAND,

Via email.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"Gordon Strachan is on course to follow Willie Maley and Jock Stein as the only Celtic manager to win three consecutive League titles."

THOMAS McGUIGAN, BBC Sport website
(Paul Cassidy)

"Some Hull City supporters have had to wait 104 years for this day.

Commentator, Radio 5 Live
(E.A. Leteve)

"The heat can quite literally fry your brain like a boiled egg."

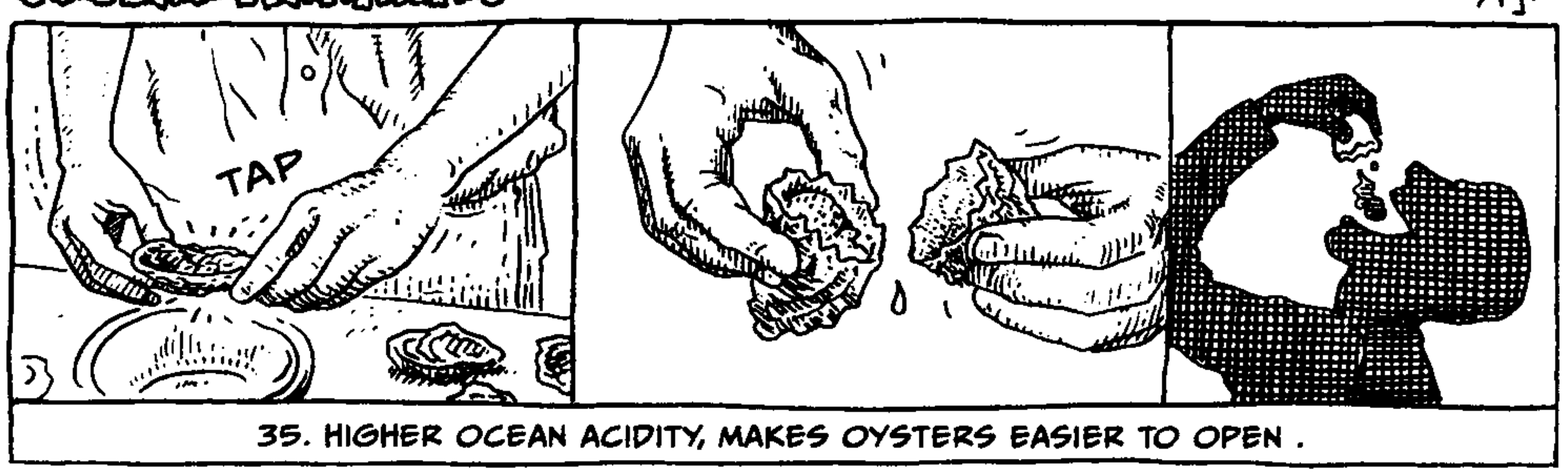
Commentator, ITV4
(Richard Nichols)

"Obviously the changing room's full of ecstasy and everybody's happy..."

LAWRENCE DALLAGLIO, Radio 5 Live
(Shaun Savage)

"He [David Beckham] has lost his legs at the highest level."

CHRIS WADDLE, Radio 5 Live
(Rosemary Fong)



Pedantry Corner

David [sic] Landsberger is guilty of inaccurate pedantry! (Eye 1211). "It is anachronistic to speak of 'Palestine' in the first century". Because "the name was not coined" until Hadrian's day in the second century, says he.

But the name "Palestina" appears three times in the Old Testament, Authorised Version, at Exodus 15:14, which contains the accurate prophecy: "sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestina", Isaiah 14:29 and 31, another accurate prophecy: "thou, whole Palestina, art dissolved".

CRAIG BINNS.

*Daniel Landsberger's assertions on the origins of the name Palestine (Pedantry corner; Eye 1211) owe, I suspect, more to wishful thinking than historical fact. Whilst a **minority** of scholars may differ, the vast majority agree Palestine is a derivation of "Philistines" a people who dominated the region during its earliest recorded history circa. 1200 BC. The "Peleset" (more precisely, **prst**), generally identified with the Philistines, appear in the Medinet Habu inscription of Rameses III , the Onomasticon of Amenope (late Twentieth Dynasty) and Papyrus Harris I, a summary of Rameses III's reign written in the reign of Rameses IV. "Philistia" (**palastu & pilista**) the land of the Philistines is also found in Assyrian inscriptions of the time.*

L. DONOHER.

The red cross/crescent/nothingness cartoon on page 9 of eye 1211 implies that the red cross and red crescent symbols are religious in nature. In fact, they are the flags of Swizerland and the Ottoman empire with inverted colours, respectively. While it is true that the creation of the crescent was religious in nature, in that it was feared the cross would be misinterpreted, the symbol itself is emphatically secular.

The additional symbol, the red crystal, was created in 2005 to address the growing misunderstanding of the cross and crescent symbols by introducing one with no known religious connotations.

MATTHEW WILKES.

I was always under the impression that the rear wheels of a fixed wheelbase vehicle followed a curve of larger radius than the front ones when cornering. I still can't work out how it can be otherwise, but then, unlike Philip Nice (Letters, Eye 1210), I went to a comprehensive school and my degree is in zoology.

JONATHAN SWALE M.A. (Cantab).

I think your correspondent in Phnom Penh is getting confused. Surely Jacques Vergès defended Carlos the Jackal, rather than Carlos the Jekyll.

JAMIE STEERE.

So Wembley is a building because its toilets have a roof (Pedantry Corner, Eye 1211). As any northerner will tell you 'the wall' had built into it a milecastle every Roman mile and intermediate turrets. Each of these buildings had a roof and was part of the wall. If Wembley and the Coliseum are buildings because of a roofed area so is the wall.

JOHN HOLLINGTON.

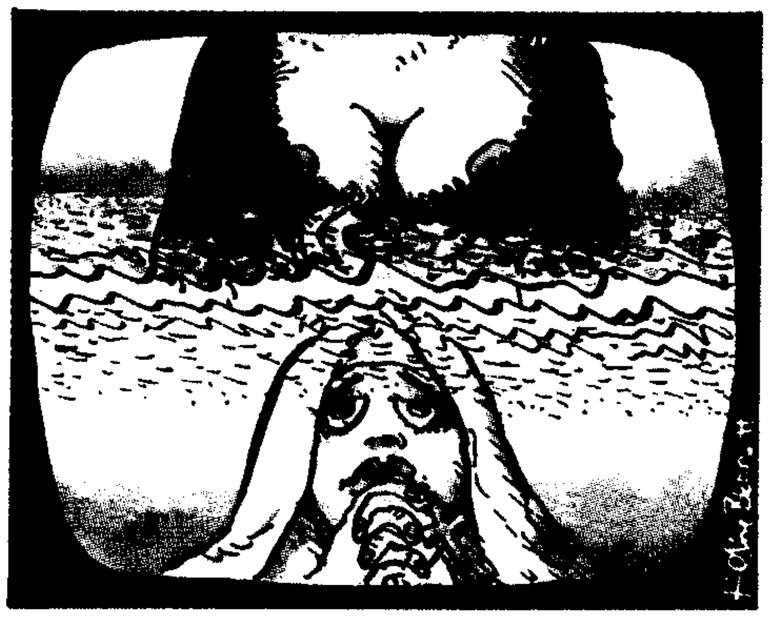
Re 'Chelsea Line-up' (Eye 1211). Going by the way your lot is lined up – an attacking 2-4-4 – it looks to me they are in for a hell of a beating – unless Banksy is standing in the wrong goal.

JIM GALLOWAY.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "It's funny to others, I suppose," Haupert Ives of the Tahiti Nui television channel told reporters in Papeete, French Polynesia, "but it doesn't really seem that way to us. One of our technicians was watching a porn movie late last night, and didn't want to turn it off, even though he knew he had to tape a religious programme coming in on satellite from Paris. He began doing this correctly, but seems to have become distracted at some point, and didn't realise that



he'd ended up taping part of the porn movie, as well as most of the satellite programme.

"That wouldn't have mattered if he had verified the programme tape afterwards, but he didn't do that either. Normally, after you tape a programme, you check it over, but again he was too distracted. That's why today's 2pm religious broadcast contained three minutes of explicit adult material, including 52" of hard-core porn, before dozens of angry calls to the TNTV switchboard alerted us to the problem. The technician has been suspended from work without payment for a week, and we apologise unreservedly to worshippers. But now the unions are using it as an excuse to claim the station is undermanned, and are threatening to go on strike." *(The Fiji Times, 3/4/08. Spotter: Geoff Nickols)*

– ● –

● *AIDS 2008. The first rule against the illness is the information.*

Cases of Aids were detected in but of 40 step in the entire world, according to the experience could to be proven that in all the forms of transmission of the virus is the same ones, not they would see according to the place it is geographical.

You must not use again the self same condon. We have respect our companion, a preservative must be used for romance to oneself at the first and for love for those lot people who is on our side, all the humanity there is.

Accidental injury. One little cutting when you shave, by cranple, can produce not good infection. That's why it's necessary to take all the necessary aspetic precautions, the same that any tansmisible disease across the blood. It consist in very simple measures: desimfection of the elements after the private use and any injury, we have to take care to wath mands. Totally correct for stimulation through health.

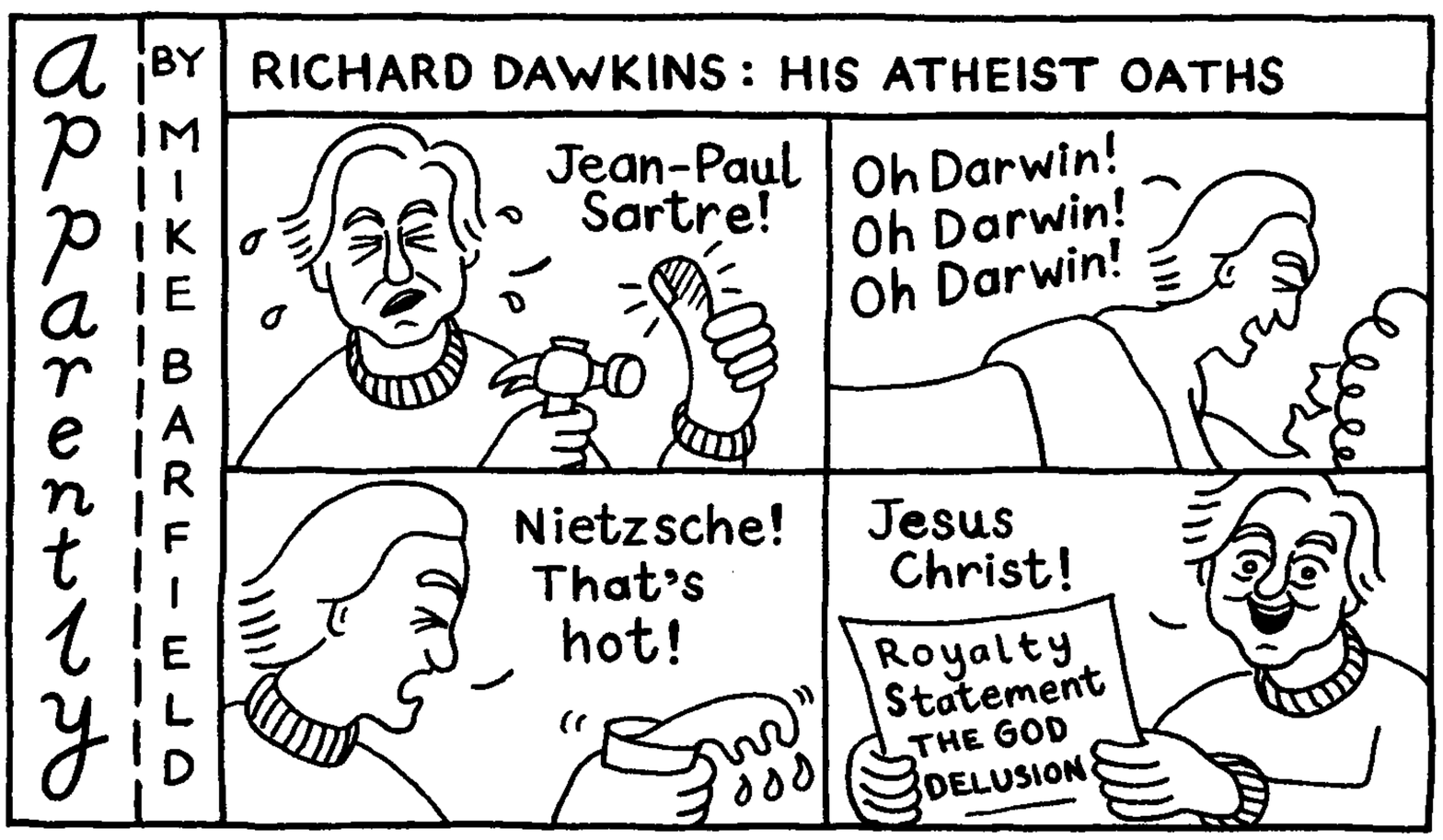
Transmition. Sexual way: across the semen. Blood way: interchange of syringes in the case of addicted yo drinks. Mother-child transmition: to put in contact genital secretions with injuries oral or faringed.

Services exist gratuitous of Information? Yes! In all the centers of health and public hospitals of the one country prunes to obtain information. Tel: 0-800-3333-444. It is one it lines gratuitous and anonymous of the ministry of Health of the Nation. (Public Health leaflet, Buenos Aires. Spotter: Hazel M. Robinson)

– ● –

● "The Cardboard Tube Fighting League was originally founded in Seattle," Daniel Gilmore told reporters in Sydney, "by a group of non-academics who radically reinterpreted the part of the American Constitution about the right to bear arms, and concluded that it refers specifically to cardboard tube fighting. Although it's not technically classified as a martial art, that's essentially what it is. And the sport's credibility will take a huge leap forward when the first Australian cardboard tube fighting national championships are held next week in Camperdown Park.

"A CTFL battle is very different from other tournaments, because there is only shared victory. On arrival, you are supplied with a long cardboard tube, and join one of two teams. Then, when battle begins, you attempt to break as many of the opposing team's tubes as possible. A tube is deemed to be broken if it completely unravels, or is severed completely. No stabbing or facial jabs are allowed, nor arm swinging, and your tube must always be held at the bottom, not the middle. I believe that Australians have an innate instinct to hit each other with cardboard tubes, and develop it when young. But sadly, this instinct is often suppressed during adulthood, and they eventually lose the ability." *(Sydney Morning Herald and CTFL web site. Spotter: Cathie Cahill)*



From The Message Boards

Members of the online community respond to the major issues of the day...

Ed Balls: Ban Alcohol For Juveniles

Is Balls-up mad? How are we supposed to stop teenagers drinking – by locking them in the cellar "24/7" (removing the wine first)? Thanks to his own politically correct government you can't lock a teenager in a cupboard for more than a couple of hours without the authorities getting involved. – ***Silent_Majority***

Shocking New Anti-Knife Ads

Ads will make knives "cool". How about some ads with school caps, blazers and ties (done up properly; not at half-mast!)? – ***Jeremy_Fisher***

dem post-ers is wierd cz the victim is alreddy warin a thick bandige but it did'nt do no goodd cz the knif gon strait thru it? – ***Dwayne***

I never lissen to radio 4 nu laber/ green proper-gander but I hurd Kirsty Young intavewing that muppit Lord Wolf, he suport's human rites for criminel's and he let the murderer-ers of Jamie Bulger go free ● neway now he own's his own privite dessert island!! an they say crime do'nt pay ● – ***Let_life_mean_death***

wats wurst is the BBC giv him a choise of luxury's to take wiv him, all at taxpay-ers ex-pence (ex-pound's more like!) 😬 – ***Born_2_booze***

Paul Gascoigne Sectioned Again

As a rugger man, I was saddened by the state of poor Gazza. He played with a smile on his face and never lost sight of the fact that soccer is only a game. What a contrast to today's spoilt "stars" like John Terry, who blub like babies. – ***Bogbrush***

i aggree bugbrush the game has lost it's sole sinse the foreiner's took over - one thing that get's me is everyone go's on about steve mCclown faling "BUT" nobody mentians that the six milion doller man Capello has faled just as bad, I don't see his England team at euro 200'8! wonce agane it seems foreiners can do "NO" wrong 😬 yes I know it ws 6 milion pound's not doller's but doller's was the name of the tv program – ***Boys_of_66***

Capello only got £6 million for doing nothing – less than most foreign scroungers get from us taxpayers! lol! – ***Cyril_the_cynic***

Type Of Biscuit Crucial To Business Meetings

Whatever the biscuit, one thing's for sure – New Labour will take it! – ***Brown_out***

PRIME MINISTERIAL DECREE NO. 22

From the Desk of the Iron Leader

(Note: Desk, not deathbed, as erroneously reported in previous directives!)

Comrades!

Let me make one thing clear. A new Age of Change has begun. Your Supreme Leader will not be deterred from the path he has chosen to lead the British people, by a motley collection of backsliders, revisionists and other subversive elements on the Left.

Britain is under threat from the enemy within (and of course without). That is why your Supreme Leader needs to assume additional powers to incarcerate all those traitors and anarchists who threaten the stability of the state.

42 days. That is the only figure which will ensure the safety of every man, woman and child in Britain.

Any less or any more and we will all be killed. This is a fact. How do I know this? How have I reached the precise figure of 42?

I have consulted the experts. And one expert in particular, whose wise counsel outweighs that of the siren voices of all those who have raised their feeble objections on the grounds that they are police chiefs, former Home Secretaries or officials of our counter-terrorist intelligence agencies.

I am referring, of course, to that profound thinker Comrade Douglas Adams, who was the first philosopher to recognise that the answer to "the meaning of life, the universe and everything" is the number 42.

If anything has governed my own thinking in my time as your Supreme Leader it is the realisation of this cosmic truth. That is why I will fight to defend this number with every fibre of my being.

Compared with this, every other issue is unimportant. 10p tax bands, fuel tax increases, nuclear power stations – on all such trivial matters I am prepared to moderate my policies, if that will help us to win the Crewe and Nantwich by-election. If this satisfies the light-headed, neo-floating voterist, chattering-dinner-party classes, so be it.

But on "42" I am immovable. There is no force on earth that can shift me.

Indeed, I am prepared to stake my entire Supreme Leadership on this number.

The clunking fist is back (not that it ever went away, during the period of my recent indisposition, under which I have now drawn a very firm line and moved on).

I am grateful to my close colleagues for their messages of unwavering support for my position as Supreme Leader, and publish them below as proof that our Party is more united than it has ever been.

From Comrade Straw, Commissar for Justice and Incarceration

I hereby pledge my undying allegiance to the Supreme Leader and wish to make clear that I am in no way planning to become Supreme Leader myself in the unthinkable event of him being forced to resign on the grounds of mental health or being lynched by infuriated mobs of embittered party members such as myself.

Comrade Straw

From Comrade Miliband, Commissar for Foreign Affairs and Ethical Rendition

I salute the Supreme Leader, now fully restored to health, we trust – although you can never be absolutely sure about these things, and should his unfortunate condition return, the Party might wish to consider the option of a younger man as its next Supreme Leader, although such an eventuality is of course extremeley remote for the time, and until that time arrives, I of course pledge my undying loyalty to whoever is the Supreme Leader before me.

Comrade Milly Band

These are just a sample of the thousands of similar pledges of loyally I have received from members of the Politburo in the last week, all of which proves that they are all standing firmly behind me as we march forward to the next great chapter in building the new, new New Age of Change.

Signed

Gordon Brown

The Supreme Leader

FRATERNAL GREETINGS TO COMRADE PRESIDENT BUSH

I am of course delighted to welcome to our country the great American despot, war criminal and friend of the discredited running dog former leader Comrade Blair – but should he wish to postpone his visit I should be the first to understand and to congratulate him on his "correct thinking".

He might well appreciate that the last thing I need at the moment is a visit from the second most hated leader in the western world. And if Comrade President Bush felt the need to remain at home due to pressing concerns over the collapse of American capitalism then I would, with some disappointment, be hugely relieved.

Gordon Brown, The Supreme Loser

ANNOUNCEMENT

DESPITE HIS many commitments our glorious leader has set aside 2 hours every day between 3.30 and 5.30am to telephone members of the public who have written to him expressing concerns over the direction of the Great Project of the Age of Change.

Comrade Brown welcomes the opportunity to tell these people where their thinking has gone wrong yet at the same time to show his human and caring side by telling them he knows where they live – and next time they will get a personal visit from the security forces, the KGB (Keep Gordon Brown) who will ask them whether they fancy a 42-day holiday at the state's expense!

Comrades Bogleby, Hargle and Pratt, PR Commissars and Image Czars to the Supreme Leader.

SLEAZE ROW ROCKS TORIES

by Our E.U. Staff **Lunchtime O'Bruges**

THE CONSERVATIVES faced a new storm yesterday over sensational revelations of Euro sleaze at the heart of the party.

The disclosures centre around top Tory MEP Reginald Bracknell-Trilby (Midlands North) and his disputed expenses claims for the financial year 1992-1993.

Sir Reginald, according to records now revealed under Brussels' new transparency guidelines, claimed €87 for the purchase of a standard Corby trouser press in October 1992 which he maintained was essential for his parliamentary duties.

He said, "As MEPs, we cannot carry out our vital work wearing crumpled trousers".

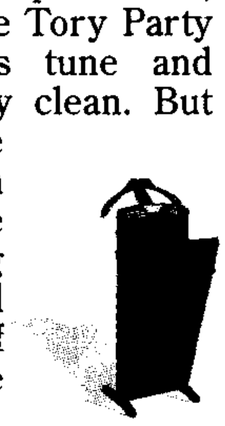
But Tory leader David Cameron now faces tough questions about what the media are already calling "Trouserpressgate". These include:

- **WAS Bracknell-Trilby using the trouserpress for *non*-parliamentary trousers, ie casual slacks, golf wear or off-duty pyjamas?**
- **WHY did Bracknell-Trilby not buy the budget Corby trouserpress model, then retailing at a mere €75?**

Bracknell-Trilby: The Face of Evil

- **WHY did Bracknell-Trilby *not* use the communal trouserpress provided for MEPs in the Barkworth Facilities Room on Floor 37 of the Giscard d'Estaing Building?**
- **DID Bracknell-Trilby employ his wife, secretary or nanny to press his trousers and then claim he had done so himself?**

Said a Labour spokesman, "We were told the Tory Party had changed its tune and was now squeaky clean. But what we are smelling from Brussels is the same stinking sewer that will spell the end of the Conservative Party for ever."



New Look For *Eye*

Watch out for next week's exciting new redesigned *Private Eye*

How it will look:

THE EDITORIAL will now be on page 94 of the Sports Section.

THE EYE Universal Register will combine all the features you don't want to read on one single page – page 17½.

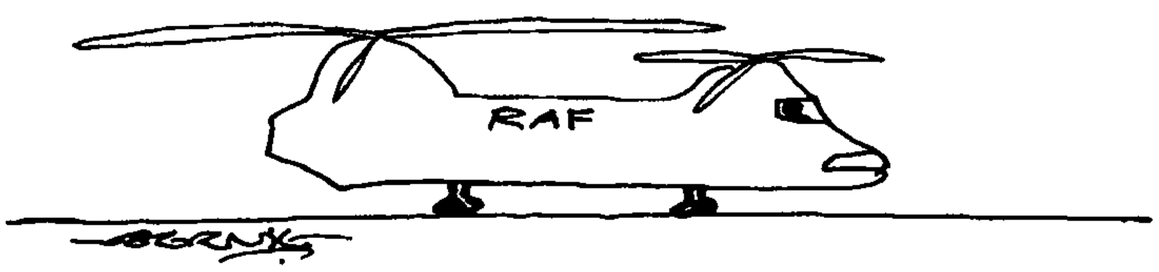
THE CROSSWORD will be printed upside down to help those readers who prefer to complete it standing on their heads.

THE SUPPLEMENT E2 will now be known as E3 and will carry the weather forecast, nature notes and the front page.

OBITUARIES will now be buried away where you can't find them.

Don't miss all this and more in the new-look Eye!

"If happy little bluebirds fly above the rainbow, why, oh why, can't I...?"



GLENDA SLAGG

The Nation's BIG Sister!?! (Geddit?)

■ **OH FERN!?!! How could you let us gals down?!? For years you've been telling us that Fat is Flabulous but all the time you were conning us – you big fat fibber!?!! No offence, Fernie – or should I say Fattie!!?! The truth is you were preaching that looking like a pudding is good, while all along you were having the money-grabbing medics fit you up with a rubber band round your gut to stop you a-gobblin' and a-guzzlin'!!?! Shame on you!?! What a pity you didn't ask the do-anything-for-money docs to stitch up your big fat gob while they were about it!?!!**

■ POOR OLD FERN!?!! Just cos she wants to shed a few pounds in private, so she can squeeze into a bikini and splash about in the briny, the red-top rottweilers have sunk their teeth into our fun-lovin' fleshy Fern!?! Lay off her, Mister Newsman!?!! What's the world coming to when a gal can't stitch up her gut to stop her a-munchin' and a-crunchin' all the pies!?!! Who cares if she's doing ads for slimming crackers?!?? She'd be crackers not to!?!! A gal's gotta earn a crust – or in her case a great big fat pie!?! Take a tip from Auntie Glenda, Fern!?! Tell the nosy presshounds to f*** off!?! Including me!?!!

■ **LORD SNOWDON!?!! What a disgrace!?!! This so-called photographer was once married to the Queen's sister, yet now his diaries reveal that he spent more time in the bedroom than the darkroom!?! Watch the birdie?!? He certainly did!?!! And the randy old goat is still at it!!? He's almost 100 but he's still a-leerin' and a-peerin', a-fumblin' and a-tumblin' with anything in a skirt!?! Put your long lens away and pop some bromide in your Horlicks!?! No offence, Your Lordship!!?!**

■ HATS OFF to Lord Snowdon!?!! The septuagenarian sex bomb gives us all hope of a randy old age!?!! And why shouldn't he, for Gawd's sake!?! Just cos he was married to Princess Margaret once doesn't mean he has to be a monk for the next 50 years. And the Princess was no angel either!?!! God rest her soul!?!! No, he's had a tough time, our Snowdy, and now he deserves a bit of the other to brighten up his twilight years!?!!

■ HERE THEY ARE – Glenda's Summer Sizzlers!?!

- **Max Mosley.** If it's an orgy you're after, drop into my pit and I'll give you a service you won't forget!?! Heil Hitler!!?!
- **Archbishop Sentamu.** The sky-diving sky pilot from the city of York!?! How would you like to land on me, Your Grace?!??
- **Sir 'Parky' Parkinson!?!!** Arise, Sir Michael!?!! Geddit?! You will if you come round here for a chat!?!!

Byeee!!

Court Circular

Royal Lancaster Hotel, Tuesday

Princess Kate of Middleton, the occasional live-in Partner Royal to his Royal Highness Prince William, attended a dog-fight accompanied by Charlie Ricketson-Smyhte, Pongo Willoughby-Hutch, Chelsy Tractor (on and off girlfriend by appointment to his Royal Highness Prince Harry) and Lord Dettol and his dog Mosley who was Victor Ludorum in his class *(Rottweilers)*.

Burlington House

Mr Pete Doherty was Guest of Honour at this year's Royal Academy Dinner at Burlington House.

Other guests included Miss Amy Winehouse, the troubled singer, Mr Gazzwell Gazza, the troubled footballer, Miss Jade Goody, the troubled reality television star, Mr Dirstwell Desmond, from the Express Newspapers and Asian Babes magazine group, and other well-known luminaries of the world of art.

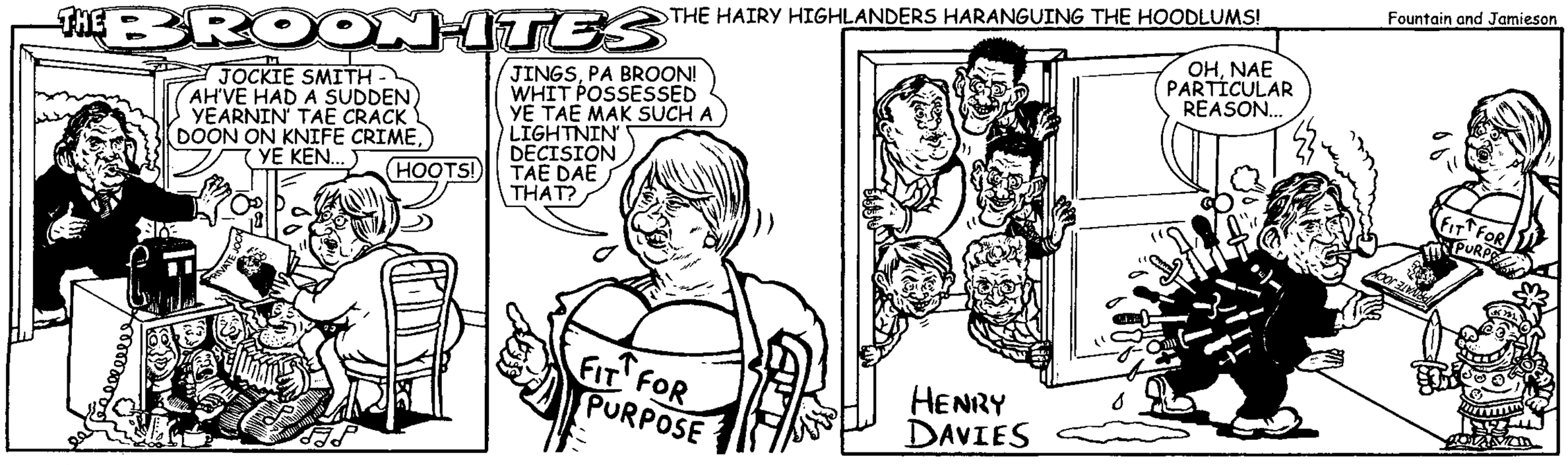
York Minster

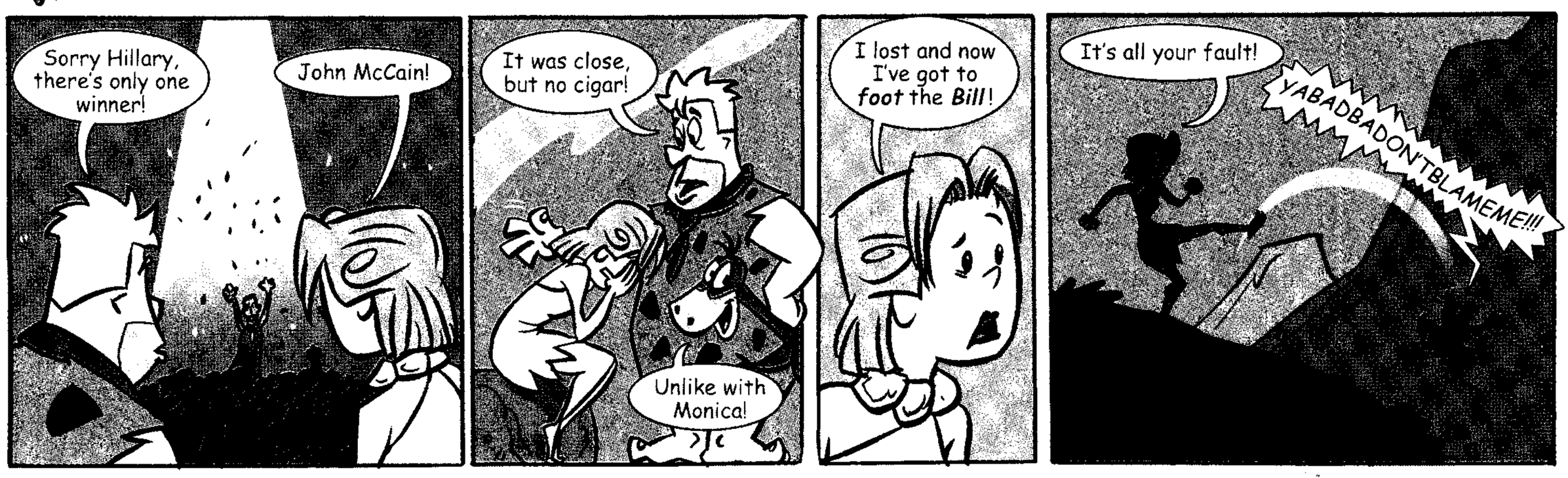
Today, the Archbishop of York, the Very Reverend John Sentamu, will bungee jump off the top of the Minster as a protest against recent events in Burma.

This will be followed by tea and cakes in the Accident and Emergency Department of York hospital.

Dave Snooty AND HIS PALS

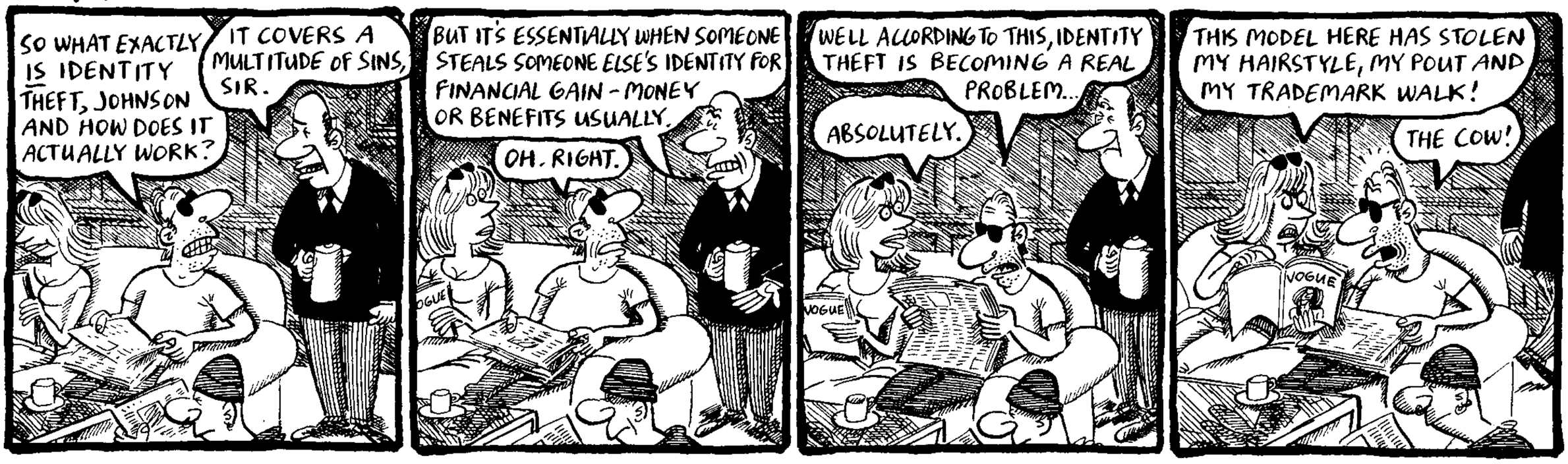
DAVE TACKLES THE IMPORTANT ISSUES...
CENTRE PARTING
A NUMBER 10 PLEASE, BARBER !
VOICE OF READER
IS IT A WIG?
NO, IT'S A TORY !
TUG !
YOU IDIOT DAVE - WE SAID YOU NEEDED A CENTRE PARTY !!!
I'M THE HAIR TO BLAIR
NOT TOO MUCH OFF THE TOFF !
IT'S ALL BEGINNING TO GEL, EH, READERS ?


THE BROON-ITES
THE HAIRY HIGHLANDERS HARANGUING THE HOODLUMS!
Fountain and Jamieson
JOCKIE SMITH - AH'VE HAD A SUDDEN YEARNIN' TAE CRACK DOON ON KNIFE CRIME, YE KEN...
HOOTS!
PRIVATE JOCK
JINGS, PA BROON! WHIT POSSESSED YE TAE MAK SUCH A LIGHTNIN' DECISION TAE DAE THAT?
FIT FOR PURPOSE
OH, NAE PARTICULAR REASON...
HENRY DAVIES


MEET THE CLINTSTONES - THE PREHISTORIC FIRST FAMILY
Sorry Hillary, there's only one winner!
John McCain!
It was close, but no cigar!
Unlike with Monica!
I lost and now I've got to *foot* the *Bill*!
It's all your fault!
YABADBADON'TBLAMEME!!!

Celeb

LIGGER


SO WHAT EXACTLY IS IDENTITY THEFT, JOHNSON AND HOW DOES IT ACTUALLY WORK?
IT COVERS A MULTITUDE OF SINS, SIR.
BUT IT'S ESSENTIALLY WHEN SOMEONE STEALS SOMEONE ELSE'S IDENTITY FOR FINANCIAL GAIN - MONEY OR BENEFITS USUALLY.
OH. RIGHT.
VOGUE
WELL ACCORDING TO THIS, IDENTITY THEFT IS BECOMING A REAL PROBLEM...
ABSOLUTELY.
THIS MODEL HERE HAS STOLEN MY HAIRSTYLE, MY POUT AND MY TRADEMARK WALK!
THE COW!

THAT WORLD FOOD CRISIS SUMMIT IN FULL

by Our Food Staff **F.A. O'Booze**

THOUSANDS of delegates flew into Rome from all over the world to discuss what they were going to have for lunch *(Surely the growing world food shortage? Ed.)*.

Attendees were first treated to a two-hour speech by Iran's prime minister Mohammed Ahmedinajacket, who blamed the Jews for eating all the world's food, thus leaving none for anyone else.

The Iranian leader's comments were greeted by applause from the Arab delegations.

Next to speak was Zimbabwe's President Mugabe, 96, who blamed the British colonialists for eating all his country's food, thus leaving none for his people.

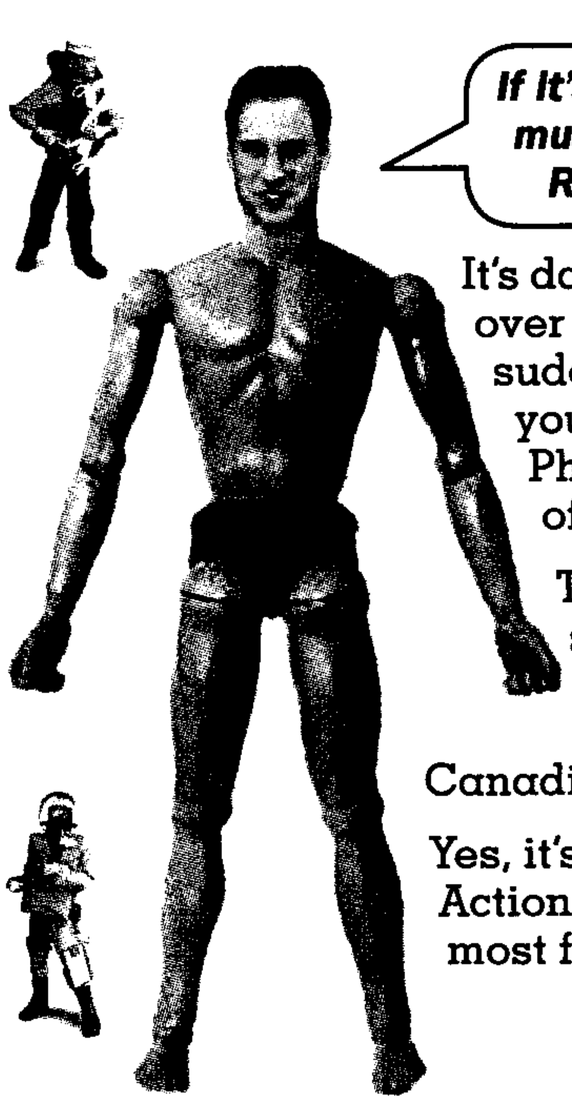
His speech was greeted with a standing ovation from the African delegates.

Condoleezza Rice-Shortage

Finally, the Rev. "Banksy" Moon, the mural painter and religious leader who has recently taken over as Secretary-General of the UN, proposed that €700 billion should be given to the UN to organise further conferences on this important issue.

Advertisement

ACTION PRINCE™



If It's Thursday, I must be In the Royal Navy

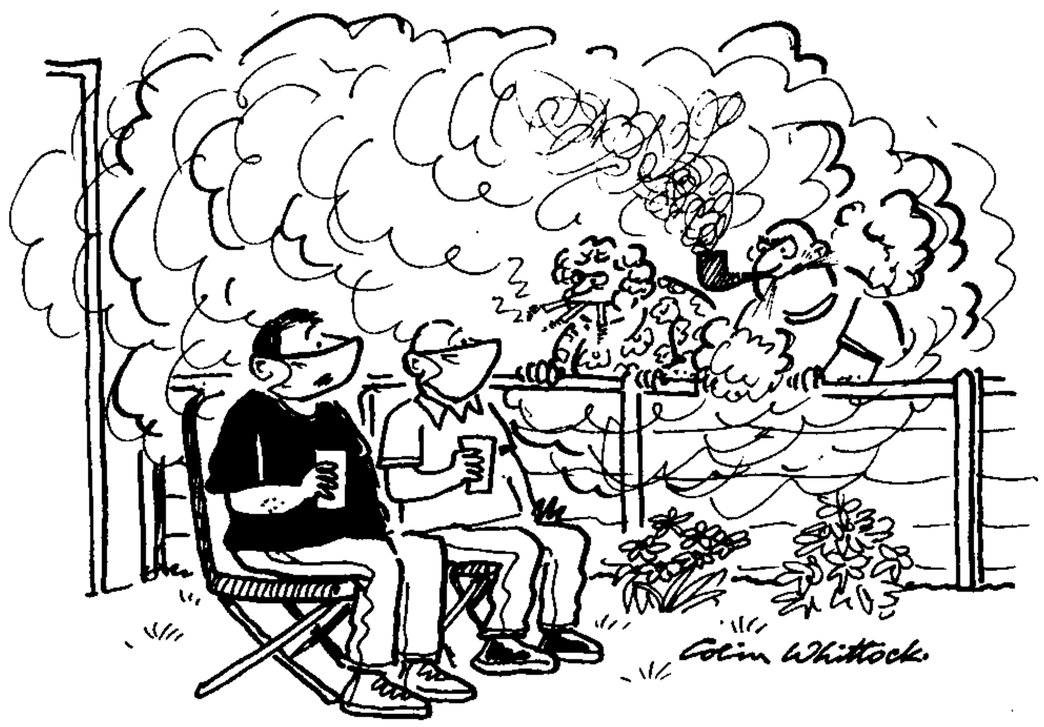
It's dawn. The mist is rising over the river and then suddenly out of nowhere you see them! Photographers. Hundreds of them.

There's only a split second to decide – what outfit to wear! Army, Air Force, Royal Navy or Canadian Mounted Police?

Yes, it's all in a day's work for Action Prince™, the world's most famous adventure figure.

Hours of fun!

Price: £1.7m per week



"Are you still having problems with your neighbours?"

Boris Calling London

Your new Mayor's weekly message

WHAT HO, chaps! Oh Gosh! I mean, yo bros! I want you all to know that I'm working jolly hard at this Mayor lark. In fact, so hard that I've decided to give up my old job as MP for Henley (very agreeable, lots of trees, river flowing by, Pimms No. 1, pity all those yobs turn up to the regatta, woops, no offence yobboes!!). Anyway, you can't do two jobs at once. Everyone knows that. That's why I'm off to write my column for the Telegraph. Plenty of spondoolicks there for Brother Boris, donchaknow? Quids pro Boriso, as we Latin scholars put it! Anyway, bit short of a theme this week in the old DT, so I thought I'd write about how you shouldn't do two jobs at once! Brilliant, eh? Toodlepip, woops, I mean, respect!

Yours,

Bo Jo

(formerly Boris Johnson MP)

BORIS'S THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

If people learned Latin and Greek, they wouldn't go around stabbing people like they did to Julius Caesar, er... cripes!

"Gordon Brown is on television, reassuring everybody that he has everything under control"

I Say These Immigrants Should All Be Shot

says the Daily Mail's **Phil Space**

BLIMEY, guv, they've got a nerve haven't they? Coming over here to live off handouts and steal our food.

Bloody Canada Geese, who asked them to fly in? They're bloody idle too, instead of going down Hackney Marshes with all the other geese they hang around Hyde Park doing their business all over the grass, disgusting isn't it? Little kiddies could go blind. I tell you last week I picked up this fare just off St James Park and this bloody great goose came and sat on my nice clean bonnet so I told him to f*** off home *in Polish*, it's the only language these geese understand. Do you know what I'd do? Shoot the lot of them!

I had that Conrad Black in the back of my cab once with *his* Canadian bird, Barbara Amiel, blimey I wouldn't mind goosing her, eh guv... D'you geddit?

© *Daily Mail*

An **HEIR OF SORROWS** Special
by Dame Sylvie Krin, author of *Born To Be Queen, Love In The Saddle, Duchess of Hearts, You're Never Too Old*, etc

END OF THE LINE

THE STORY SO FAR: Charles and Camilla are watching television after a hard day at work in the new Highgrove organic rice paddy (formerly the croquet lawn)...

"AND here is the News At Ten"... the familiar soothing tones of Sir Trevor Barbados sounded above the drumming of the June rain against the French windows in the Edward VII TV lounge.

Charles and Camilla sat, as they did every night, in their matching zebra-skin thrones, a present from King Machete III of Bazuka (formerly British Bazukaland).

"Can't we watch something else, Chazza? This is really boring. Desperate Housewives is on the other side. Give us the remote."

"No, no, no," Charles remonstrated, slipping the control surreptitiously under the rhinocerous leather cushions. "I seem to have lost the thingy anyway. We have to keep up with what's going on in the world. It's very important. Look... you see."

Charles pointed excitedly at the 46" plasma screen, a gift from the Tetbury Audio 'n' Television Solutions Centre.

The screen filled with pictures of an enormous ocean liner, being towed slowly into the sunset, as Sir Trevor sonorously intoned.

"And today was a sad day for one of the grand old ladies of the sea, now going into retirement after decades of faithful service.

"The Queen Elizabeth II was loved by everyone all over the world as a symbol of a more graceful age.

"But now, sadly, she has been sold to President Sudoku of Amnesia, as a floating casino."

Charles felt a tear well up in his eye, as he took a comforting sip of his favourite single malt Glen Hoddle whisky ("A wee dram afore ye drop off").

Camilla jumped up with a sigh of impatience. "If you're going to get maudlin, Chazza, I'm going out for a fag," she said, reaching for her packet of Hockney's Full Strength.

"But it's pouring, darling, you'll get soaked to the skin. You'd better get Fitztightly to hold an umbrella over you."

"Good idea, Chazza! Have we still got that one from Harrods? You know, the one saying *'The Duke of Edinburgh is guilty'*. Bloody funny, don't you think?"

But Charles was no longer listening. He had once again been transfixed by the moving spectacle on the television screen, showing the last emotional journey of the majestic Royal ship.

A terrible sense of weariness came over him. "It's very sad, isn't it – and yet somehow inevitable..."

"IT'S very sad and yet somehow inevitable," said the newly-crowned King Charles III, as he watched from the balcony of Buckingham Palace the moving spectacle of his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, being towed away in a large lorry.

She was still gesticulating angrily at this undignified end to her long years of service, as the lorry moved inexorably into the far distance.

Charles waved a fond farewell to the old Queen as she went off to start her new life as a croupier in the Prince Philippine islands.

And who should be standing at his side but the silver-tongued commentator, now Lord Barbados of Bong, describing the scene to a grateful nation. "And so she slips away, this grand old lady. A little slower now, beginning to show her age, bits of rust appearing around the funnels – and to be quite honest, fit for nothing but the scrapyard.

"But, fortunately, the nation has a brand new replacement, fit and ready to serve."

"That's me," cried Charles excitedly, as the vast waiting crowd began to cheer, chanting "The Queen has gone, long live the King."

"Vivat Carolus," cried the tousle-haired new prime minister of England, Sir Boris Johnson, as he rode up the Mall on his hydrogen-powered bicycle.

Overhead screamed the Red Arrows, led by Squadron Leader Prince William.

And in the Palace forecourt, below the balcony, Col. Prince Harry ordered a 21-gin salute from the 17/21st King's Own Hooray Henrys.

The only person who seemed to be absent from this joyful scene was his wife, now the Queen Consort. And yet, wasn't that her voice that he could hear in the distance... "I couldn't find that bloody umbrella anywhere..."

"I COULDN'T find that bloody umbrella anywhere," boomed Camilla, standing over him in his chair, her sodden hair clinging to her head like seaweed to a rock. "But I went out for a fag anyway."

Charles dragged himself painfully from his reverie. "I was having this amazing dream about the mater. Apparently she had sort of retired, and I had become, you know, the Kingie-thingie."

"Dream on, Chazza," she laughed, as a rumble of thunder echoed round the distant Lymeswold hills.

To be continued...

© Dame Sylvie Krin 2008, The Ryanair Book Choice for June

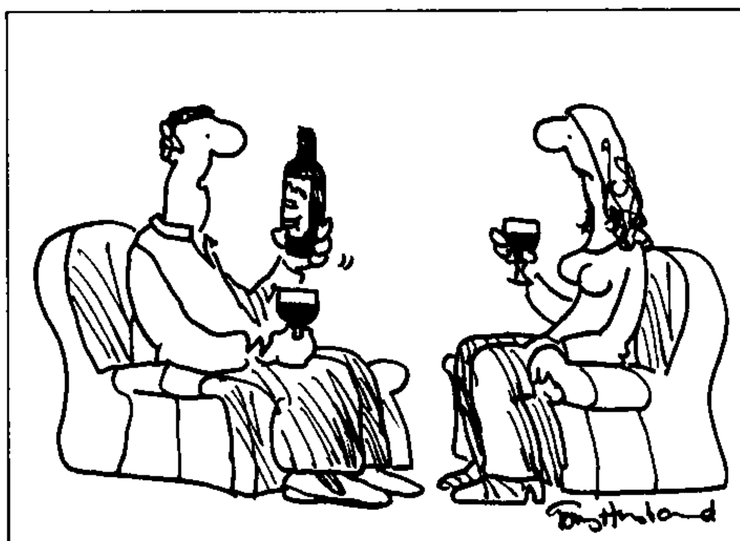
"What's got into the sheep?!"

THAT SECRET KEN LIVINGSTONE WINE HOARD IN FULL

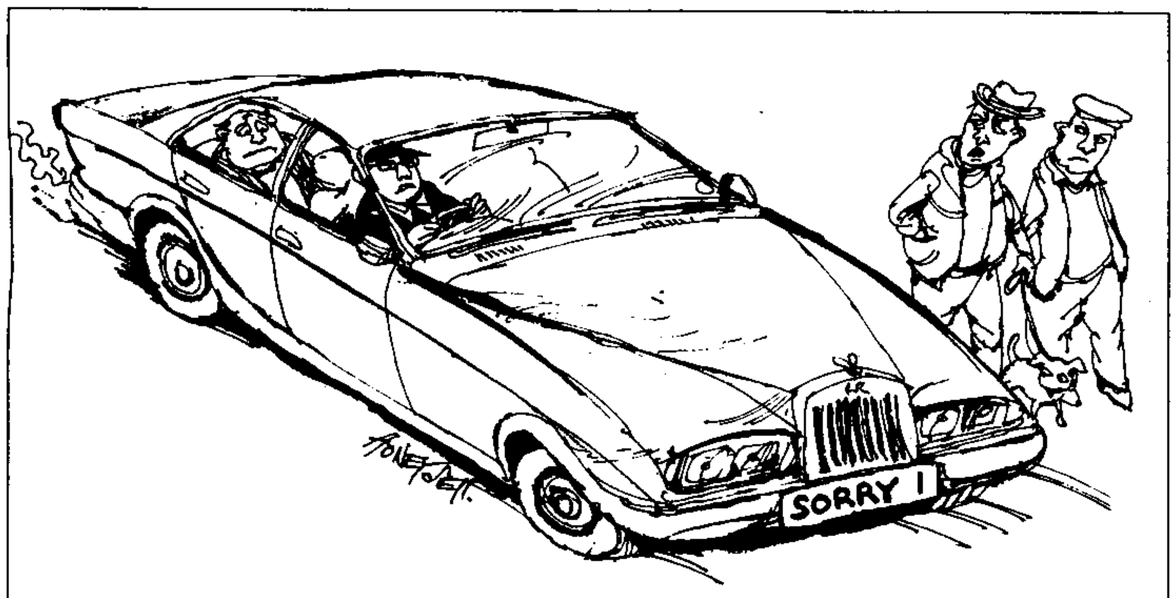
■ **WHAT they found in County Hall.**

Chavez Neuf du Pape
Newt St. Georges
Mayorlot
Vin Rouge Ken Ordinaire

(That's enough. Ed.)

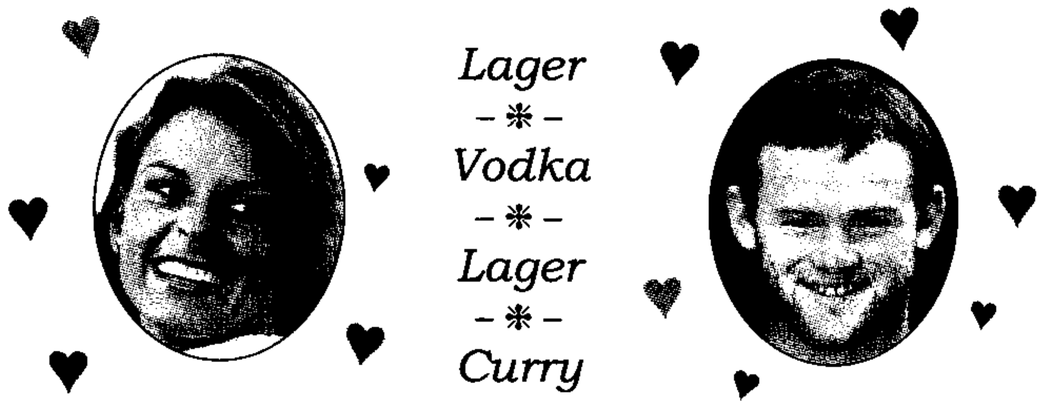


"Well, there's a sign of global warming... our first Icelandic red"



"If there's one thing worse than a rich bastard it's a contrite rich bastard"

That Wayne Rooney/Coleen McLoughlin Wedding Feast In Full



Ambulances at 5.13am

EYE SPORT

Our Cut-Out-And-Keep Guide To The 2008 European Football Championships

Who won't you be supporting?

- ☐ France
- ☐ Italy
- ☐ Germany
- ☐ Spain
- ☐ Austria

What channel will you be watching when the games are screened on BBC1 and ITV?

- ☐ Living TV
- ☐ The Discovery Channel
- ☐ CBeebies
- ☐ Granada Men & Motors
- ☐ Dave

(That's enough Euro 2008 coverage. Ed)

A Doctor Writes

THE heart condition which forced Bradford and Bingley's chief executive Steven Cranshaw to resign this week with immediate effect is one that unfortunately has become all too common in the stressful modern banking world.

The heart condition, known as *Cardiacus extremelis conveniensis,* commonly strikes immediately after a chief executive is forced to announce massive losses as a result of the credit crunch, causing his board and his shareholders to gasp for breath.

The good news for Mr Cranshaw is that one of the most common side effects experienced by other sufferers of this condition is a massive million-pound pay-out from bewildered shareholders.

So his bank account, unlike theirs, can expect to make a full recovery.

© A Doctor.

SIX NOT TO WATCH IN EURO 2008

The Eye's Cut-Out-and-Keep Guide to the soccer stars you won't be seeing this summer

Frank Lampard
Experts say that 'Lamps' is almost 100% sure to make it through to the final which he will watch on his 48" plasma screen in the living room.

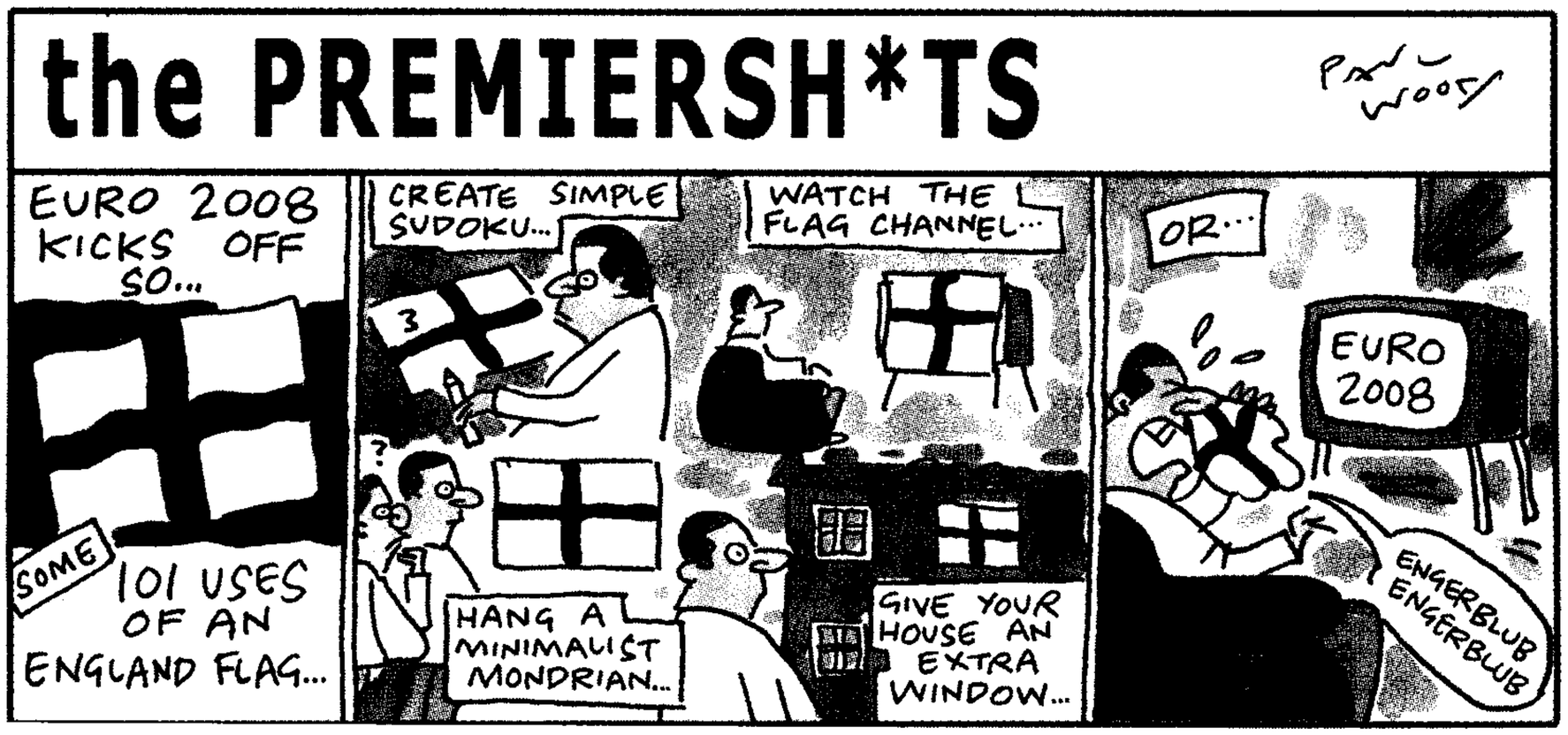
David Beckham
Hotly tipped to be in America lying by his pool.

Wayne Rooney
A dead cert to be on honeymoon or getting divorced in *Hello!* magazine.

Ashley Cole
The controversial left back is the pundits' choice to go all the way to the nightclub before vomiting over some bimbo he's just picked up.

The Late Paul Gascoigne
Troubled 'Gazza' won't be in Europe or possibly even on earth as medical experts *(That's enough).*

the PREMIERSH*TS



MODERN INN SIGNS

Advertisement

LYVITA

Fern Britton says,

"Losing weight is easy. Just eat sensibly and take regular exercise"*

**Oh, and then remember to undergo a major surgical procedure with the insertion of a gastric band. That bit is quite important actually.*

DRAWING ALL FAITHS TOGETHER

Hello,
You may remember me! – I used to be vicar for a little parish called St. Albions but guess what, I'm now the vicar of a global parish – and not just for **one** faith but for **all** faiths. One way you could look at me is that I'm there for everyone whatever they believe – a bit like God!

So, now I am appealing to people of every faith around the world to come together in a common cause, under my leadership, to solve all the world's problems.

Goodness me, it's not as though there are that many of them!

I've solved some of the big ones already – Northern Ireland, for one, and the Middle East for another.

So, how about this for a big idea? Why don't all of us, be we Christians or Muslims or Jews – and hey, aren't we all the children of Abraham anyway? – why don't we all get together and kill a mosquito each and every day?

And, hey, wouldn't that end the dreadful curse of malaria, just like that! There are 9,386 million mosquitos in the world – but many more believers!

So let's get mosquito hunting – for Africa, for Aisa, for the world, for the universe.

SORTED!

And remember, here at DAFT, we **do** do God!

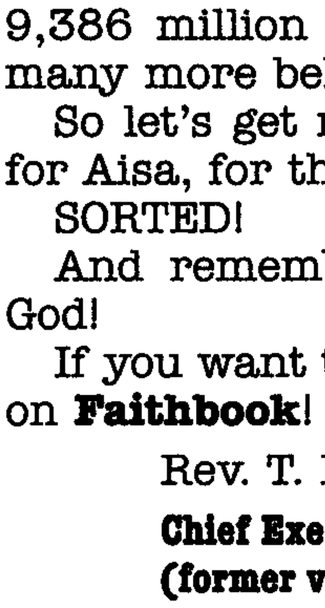
If you want to join DAFT then visit my site on **Faithbook**!

Rev. T. Blair

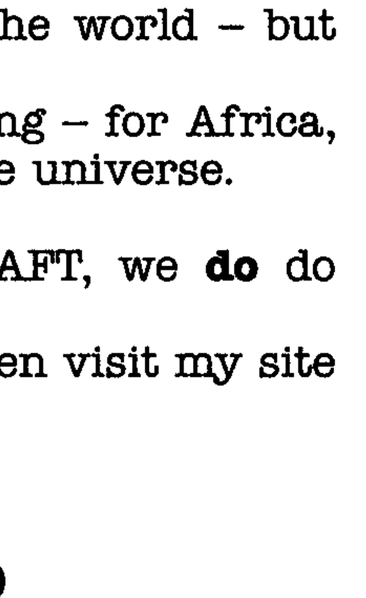
Chief Executive, D.A.F.T.
(former vicar of St. Albion's)

'MAKING A BETTER TODAY TOMORROW'

Obama's Vision



It's the end of an era... It's time for a change. We need a new way of thinking...



... LET'S BOMB IRAN!

POLLY FILLER

THEY say that exams are getting easier. Well they are not! Take it from me, they are hell. I've just been through Charlie's SATs and they were the toughest three months of my life. Easy? You try organising extra tuition across the curriculum for an incredibly bright seven-year-old, albeit one who is classified as Differently Gifted by the staff at St. Duncetans.

Then there's the supervision of the revision, at which boys are notoriously useless as evidenced by my partner Simon who ended up sitting there with Charlie watching Extreme Chainsaw Darts with Richard Hammond on the Sky More Extra Plus Plus Dave Channel!

SO WHO had to get Charlie through the vital stages! Yes, of course it was me, the only one responsible enough to tell our hopeless new girl Slavia to stop crying in her room, and come down and make Charlie do some Practice Papers. Honestly she barely speaks English, let alone French and Latin!? What do they teach these girls in Turkmenistan?

So the next time some know-it-all claims that exams are not bloody hard work I'm going to hit them over the head with my new Sex and the City Louis Vitton handbag on behalf of all the mums in Britain who are trying to juggle careers and families.

AND you know what, I reckon when it comes to Working Motherhood Studies – I've passed with an A*!

Now I deserve a week's holiday – if I can trust Slavia to look after Charlie and not to put the pizza in the DVD player! Stupid girl – it's hard to believe she's got a PhD in Rocket Science from Gurbanguly-Berdimuhammedow University! Exams must be getting easier!

© Polly Filler.

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Jonathan Routh, TV Prankster

So. Farewell
Then Jonathan
Routh,

Star of *Candid Camera*.

Yes, you were
Famous for
Your practical
Jokes on
Television.
Like the
Car that had
No engine.

Now you are
Dead.

But how can
We be sure
It is not
Another of
Your hoaxes?

E.J. Thribb (17½)

● E.J. Thribb has been reading from his new anthology *Lines On The Leaving* in the Rusbridger Tent at the Guardian Wye-on-Wye Literary Festival. A podcast of his interview with Mariella Frostrup is available at www.grauniadhaybores.com.

DEATH OF A FASHION ICON

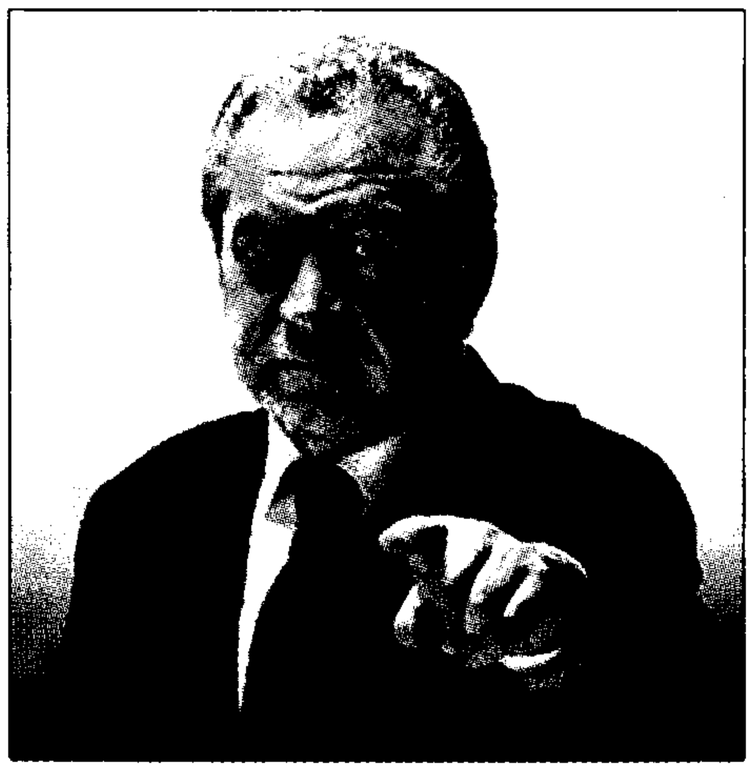
by Our Senior Fashion Editor
At Large **Anna Rexic**

The FASHION world has reacted with immense sadness and grief to the news that Yves St Laurent has died in Paris at the age of 71 after a long illness.

"Black is so out this season, how could he, of all people, do this to us?" asked one sobbing editor *(Cont. p. 94)*

The Grim Reaper wears YSL

DIARY



SIR ALAN SUGAR ON HOLIDAY

When I pay good money to relax, that's just what I want to do: relax. I want the best relaxation money can buy. Exclusive beach, cocktails with swanky umbrellas, expensive food, best stretch of sea. Is that asking too much? Well, IS IT?

So today I get to the beach. There's a little bloke on it on the bit I want to occupy, little titch, some kind of child I s'pose. Ten years old max. No experience. Waste of bloody space, if you ask me.

"So what's this when it's at home?" I ask him.

"It's a sandcastle," he says.

"Don't interrupt," I say. "I said, "What's this when it's at home, and I want an answer."

"A sandcastle," he says.

"Heard you the first time," I say. "Now I have a concern, a very big concern. I've heard of castles. And I've heard of sand. But what the bloody hell you want to waste your time making a 'sand castle' for? I'm havin' a real problem with that. You're sending me a suicide message, my friend!"

"You what?" says the midget.

"Margaret," I say, turning to my faithful employee. "Get rid of it."

"As you say, Sir Alan," she says and she pulls up her skirt and jumps up and down on the bloody sandcastle 'til it's good and flat.

The midget starts crying. I hate a whiner. "Remove him, my friend," I say to Nick, my other loyal servant. Nick picks him up by the collar and disposes of him. I believe in rewarding initiative. I give Nick and Margaret a pound each and tell them to run off and buy themselves an ice-lolly.

"Right," I think to myself. "Now I can start a bit of bloody relaxing. Where's my sunlounger?"

It's not just any old lounger. No way. Bottom line is this. You don't earn people's respect by relaxing on just any old lounger. You got to get yourself a top-of-the-range lounger, a lounger what'll give you 200% and work overtime to give you a bloody good relax. I want the best lounger money can buy. It's a tough world out there in lounger-land. It's lounger eat lounger.

So I got meself the bloody dog's bollocks of a luxury sun lounger product. It's got AS – them's my initials – embroiderated on it, all in a pattern. And it's got the whole bolllocks – personal computer with broadband, full telephone facilities, plasma TV, cocktail bar, inbuilt electric masseuse, the lot. Plus it's raised two foot higher than any other lounger on the beach, so's I can earn a bit of respect from all the busy folk relaxing hard out there.

So I've been relaxing two, three minutes with Nick and Margaret standing guard on either side of my deluxe lounger when I look up and see something very strange.

"What's them horses doin' on my bloody beach?" I says.

"I think they may be donkeys, Sir Alan," says Nick.

"Don't give me all that they-may-be-donkeys crap. Them's horses!"

"I think Nick may be right, Sir Alan," says Margaret. "They do look very much like donkeys. They've got awfully big ears. And they are going eeyore."

"No way is them horses, goin' eeyore," I tell her. "You must think I'm barking bloody mad! Them's bloody donkeys! So why'd'you tell me them's was horses, that's what I want to know?"

Rule 1. Tell it like it is. I've no time for bullshit.

"Right. Get me a ride on one of them donkeys," I tell her. "And make bloody sure it's the best one." I point at the donkey on the left. It's lying down, and looks as if it'll take orders. I can't abide a toffee-nosed namby-pamby donkey strutting round like it owns the place. I want a donkey what's prepared to lie down and get its nose dirty.

"I'll hire that one," I say. Reminded me of myself when I was his age.

Rule 2. Don't be content with second best. Listen, my friend. Here in the real world, it's donkey eat donkey.

So I'm sat there on my donkey, relaxing fit to bust. But the donkey's not moving. It's not even bloody standing.

"Call this fast?" I say. "Be under no illusion, Nick. This ain't fast. No way. This is bloody STATIONARY!"

Nick's out in front, with a carrot dangling from a stick.

"Fat lot of good your carrot's doing us," I tell him. "Margaret, there's a love, give us a push."

So Margaret's behind, pushing its arse like the bollocks, I'm kicking away and Nick's out in front, wiggling his carrot. But still the bloody donkey won't stir.

At long bloody last, Nick shows a bit of initiative. He examines the donkey up close.

"Sir Alan," he says. "This donkey's dead."

"Nick, you're starting to annoy me" I say. "Why did you go and pick me a dead donkey? You should've been able to tell it was dead by the way it was lying down. I've not got where I am by making a mistake like that. You've got a bloody nerve, my friend. With all due respect, you're total rubbish. What is he, Margaret?"

"Total rubbish, Sir Alan".

"See, Nick." I say. "Margaret agrees. What are you, Nick?"

"Total rubbish, Sir Alan."

"You know what?" I tell him. "I respect your honesty."

So now I've just about had enough of this crap beach-lark. Crap sand-castles. Crap loungers. Crap donkeys. So I look around for a decent top-of-the-range relaxation.

"What's that when it's at home?" I say, pointing.

"That's the sea, Sir Alan," says Margaret.

"So what's them waves doing, coming towards us like that?"

"I'm sure you could get them to stop it if you wanted, Sir Alan"

"Too bloody right I could. You don't get to where I am without being able to reverse the bloody tide. Go back!" I shout. "I'm sick of looking at you! Piss off back to where you bloody come from!"

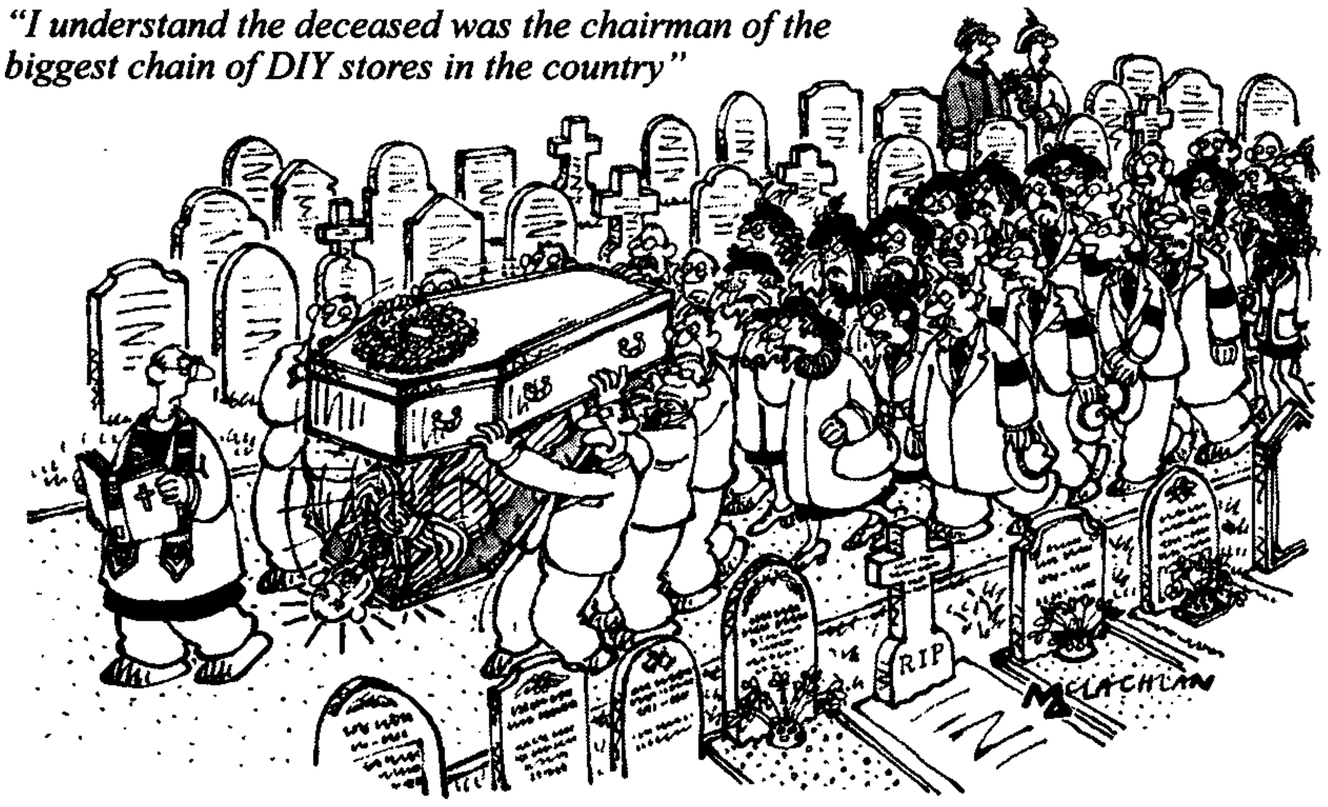
But it don't.

What I want to know is, where's the respect these days?

As told to

CRAIG BROWN

"I understand the deceased was the chairman of the biggest chain of DIY stores in the country"



"Yes, I always get a lovely show in this border – it's where I bury my husbands"

Literary Review

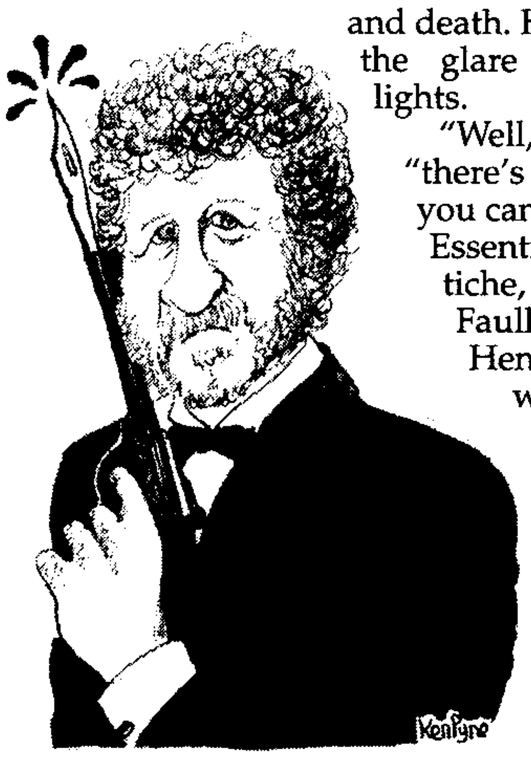
What you didn't read

Devil May Care

Sebastian Faulks writing as Ian Fleming

"COME in 007," barked M from the doorway. On the old man's desk was a book luridly decorated with the image of a blood-red poppy whose stem took the slender form of a naked woman.

"It's about this latest volume of your memoirs, James," began M. "It's a pity we lost the original F. This new F is competent enough in the post, I dare say, but I'm not sure he's got the right attitude. He claims to be writing as someone else, as though he's ashamed to put his own name to the project."



Bond shrugged.

"And look at this, James." M turned over the title page and pointed to the small print on the back. "*The moral right of the author has been asserted.*"

"What moral right would that be?" wondered M. "The right of Fleming not to have his ideas parodied by some jumped up literary cove, or the right of this Faulks fellow to protect his precious pastiche from the indignation of the purists?"

"I believe it's a common enough disclaimer," offered Bond, "and he is... licensed to quill."

❖ ❖ ❖

"And my next guest," said the talk show host, "is a man who surely needs no introduction. Ladies and gentlemen, Commander James Bond." The audience applauded politely.

"So James. Let's talk about this new book of yours, *Devil May Care*. I believe it's set mainly in Iran, or Persia as it used to be known."

"Yes, that's right," nodded Bond. He was exhausted. It had all happened such a long time ago. All those old secret ops just seemed to merge into one long parade of guns, girls, gangsters and gadgets. Luckily he'd been able to give F his old reports and briefings and F, like any hired hack, had embellished shamelessly.

"And there's this nasty fellow with a deformed hand, a sort of monkey's paw, called Dr Gorner, who runs a drug cartel and then he hatches a scheme to blow up the Soviets with nuclear weapons but make it look as though Britain did it, so they will attack us and London will become an uninhabitable wasteland."

Again, Bond simply nodded as the interviewer regurgitated his researcher's summary.

"But thanks to you and your Bond girl, who's called Scarlett Papava, in what I presume is an ironically heavy handed reference to the Latin name of the opium poppy, *Papaver somniferum*, the dastardly Gorner's plans are foiled and you return home triumphant only to find..."

"Yes, that's right," said Bond. "But let's not spoil the ending."

"So if you could sum up the message of this book, James. What would that be?"

Bond thought about life and death. His eyes ached in the glare of the studio lights.

"Well," he began, "there's only so much you can flog a dead spy. Essentially this is a pastiche, or 'pistache' as Faulks likes to call it. Hence his use of the word 'Pistachio' as the Service's code word for Persia. But though he's writing it with his left hand, his monkey's paw as it were, it's actually rather good, at any rate much better than most of his other stuff, so he'll probably get asked to do it again, and may even be better remembered for this than his so-called literary stuff. And won't that annoy him! But if that's what happens I suppose you could say he'll have been hoist by his own pistache." *(Continued for 94 more novels)*

The Poetry Circus

WENDY COPE has already turned it down. Lauren Laverne, that well-known cultural savant, tips Simon Armitage. The usual gaggle of defiant lowbrows has started writing to the papers in praise of Pam Ayres. From the middle distance rises the twitter of reedy, feminist voices suggesting it would be nice to have a woman for a change. What are we talking about here? Why, the Poet Laureateship, not actually up for grabs until Andrew Motion steps down sometime next year, but already inciting the arts correspondents of the posh prints to frenzy.

The man we have to thank for this prolonged election campaign is, curiously enough, Tony Blair, for it was he who decided, shortly after Ted Hughes' death back in 1998, that future incumbents would have to make do with a 10-year term. No doubt this decision had something to do with increasing literary longevity, and the memory of Sir John Masefield, appointed to the job in 1935, who defied expectations by going on for another 32 years. But it also gestured at "new" Labour's expectations for the role: less a reward for being the nation's leading poet, as an acknowledgment of the poet's status as one of those glorified cultural cheerleaders in whom the modern age so exultantly delights. Not for nothing was the late Mo Mowlam heard quite seriously to maintain that Sir Paul McCartney would be just the ticket.

In the end Macca didn't get the nod. Still, Andrew Motion's appointment in 1999 marked the first occasion in more than a century that merit had taken a back seat to plausibility. Not since Sir Alfred Austin, author of those immortal lines about a royal illness ("And o'er the wire the electric message came/He is no better, he is much the same"), was shoehorned into the job by Lord Salisbury on political grounds in 1896, had a candidate scooped the pot for essentially non-literary reasons (in this case conforming to the general estimate of what a poet ought to look like) rather than for writing good poetry.

Siren voices who canvassed the attractions of major talents such as D.J. Enright and Geoffrey Hill were quietly ignored. What was wanted, it became clear, was an ambassador for poetry, someone who didn't mind writing tinkling little effusions for the *Times* on great occasions, going into schools and all the rest of it. Motion, occasional complaints about the fees charged to literary festivals aside (see *Eyes passim*), has been jolly good at this, and can be confidently predicted to carry off a knighthood this time next year.

None of this, though, answers the fundamental question of what the Poet Laureateship is for. By far the most sensible comments so far published have been those of Wendy Cope, in explaining to a Hay Festival audience why she didn't want the job. Nothing to do with her views on the royal family, the author of *Making Cocoa for Kingsley Amis* amiably deposed: it was just that the post carried "ridiculous expectations", courtesy of "the public and the media". No enthusiasm for the campaign to appoint a woman, either – sheer tokenism, Ms Cope continued, which ought to be stoutly resisted.

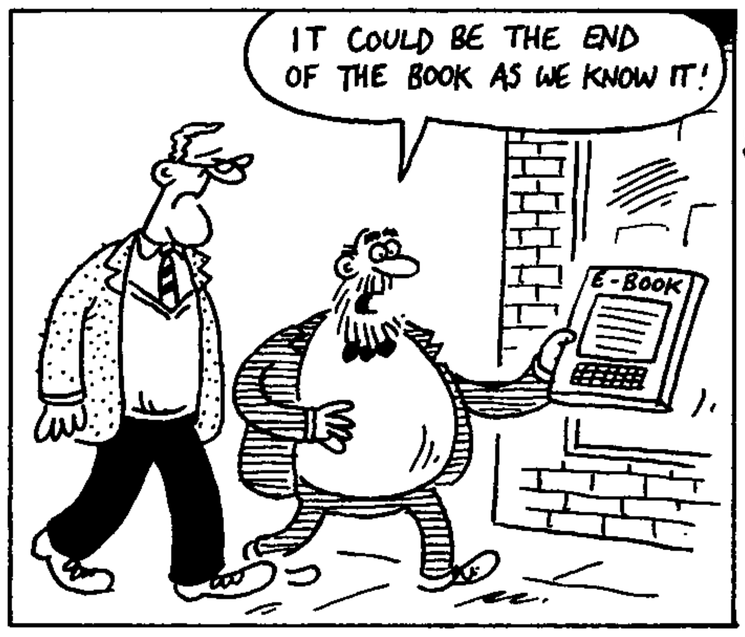
Naturally this won't stop the bandwagons currently rolling in favour of, as it might be, Carol Ann Duffy, Lavinia Greenlaw or Ruth Padel. Essentially what we are left with, whoever gets the job, is a *fait accompli* of the sort that now affects the Booker, the Costa and any other literary occasion you care to name. Either it has to join a media party in which literary considerations will always be secondary to general razzamatazz, or it can slip sedately down the slow incline to obscurity.

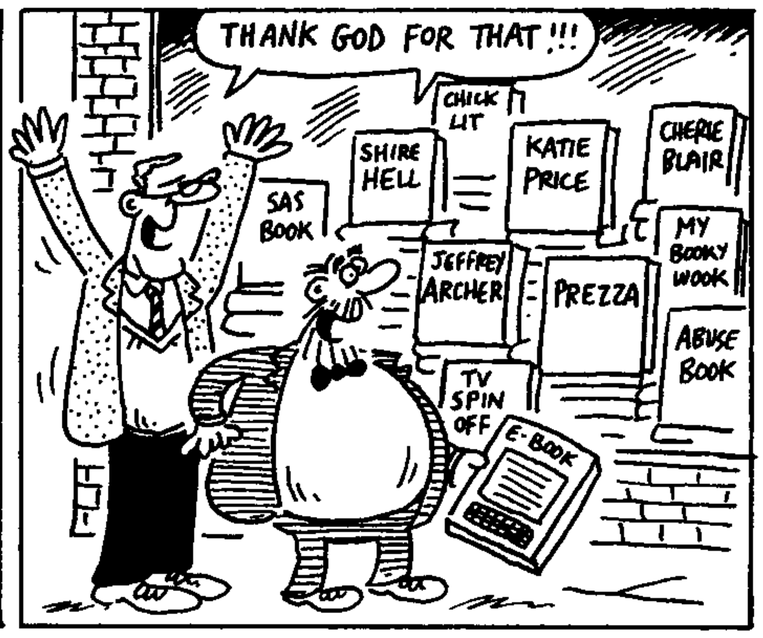
So, with a year to run, my money's on Master Armitage or Ms Duffy here – feisty northern types guaranteed to collar the column inches. All the same, it would be wonderful if, in a fit of absence, Number Ten appointed Geoffrey Hill or Alan Jenkins and had to sit exasperatedly by for the next 10 years as the people's poet disdained the fuss and simply got on with the job for which nature intended him.

Bookworm overleaf ☛

FIRST DRAFTS

Germaine Greer





Private Eye's Worst-Seller Chart: Political Memoirs

Position	Author	Title	Published	Hype	Headline grabber	Sales to date
1	Cherie Blair	*Speaking for Myself*	Little, Brown, May	Serialisations in *Times, Sun, Radio 4*, endless publicity everywhere	More about her sex life than you ever wanted to know	15,616
2	Jonathan Powell	*Great Hatred, Little Room: Making Peace in Northern Ireland*	Bodley Head, March	Serialisation in *Guardian*	We should talk to Al-Qaeda	4226
3	Lord Levy	*A Question of Honour: Inside New Labour and the True Story of the Cash for Peerages Scandal*	Simon and Schuster, May	Serialisation in *Mail on Sunday*	Tony thinks Gordon's rubbish	1,652
4	John Prescott	*Prezza: My Story: Pulling No Punches*	Headline, May	Serialisation in *Sunday Times*	"I'm bulimic"	1,311

Books & Bookmen

■ TO THE Royal Festival Hall for the annual Orange Prize hen night, where various sisters inveighed against the "grumpy old men" who each year delegate one of their number to denounce the women-only awards.

Unfortunately for them, the carpers' argument that the prize has become redundant because its main goal (overcoming sexism in prize selections) has been achieved was then eloquently put by, er, the winner. Rose Tremain – a generally popular choice, confusingly told the "guys" to "stop grumping", while putting her success alongside others: "AL Kennedy has the won the Costa, Anne Enright has won the Booker, and Doris Lessing has won the Nobel."

In fact, this list of female triumphs could be extended: the previous Booker winner was also a woman, as were the three previous winners of the Costa/Whitbread Book of the Year pot before Kennedy. In fiction, the case for a separate prize where women reward women because unisex prizes are sexist grows weaker by the year; possibly the time has come for Orange to switch its attention to non-fiction, where the battle has yet to be won. Five of this year's six finalists for the Samuel Johnson Non-fiction Prize are men, and only two women have won since 1999. Pretty much the pre-Orange ratio in Booker winners, in fact.

■ TREMAIN'S win made it a good night for Chatto, and she dedicated the award to her editor Penny Hoare. But another of the Random House imprint's authors departed empty-handed, arguably as a result of tactical bungling. *The Outcast* was good enough to put Chatto's Sadie Jones on the main Orange Prize shortlist, and as a first novel it also made her eligible for the New Writers award – which logically (as the best the three shortlistees for that award achieved in the senior prize race was a single longlist place) she would have won. Why, then, wasn't she in contention as a new writer? Simple: she wasn't submitted.

■ AS Ian Fleming worked on the *Sunday Times*, it was naturally chosen for Sebastian Faulks's first interview about his 007 thriller and an extract from it.

Buried away in *Devil May Care*, however, is a sly passage that won't delight the paper's executives when they come to read it. Having captured Bond, the villain reveals he only decided to destroy late-60s Britain by flooding it with heroin after rejecting another strategy: "Suppose I had bought the most distinguished paper of your Establishment hypocrites, the *Times*. Then I could have put it in the hands of some malleable editor who shared my hatred of Britain and attacked the country from his own mouthpiece. I could have bought television channels, other papers... I could have piped in pornography and propaganda through every inlet until... But, no, Bond. It would have taken too long." No prices for guessing who's being satirised.

■ HUNDREDS of authors, teachers and booksellers decried loopy publishing industry plans to put age guidance figures on all children's books.

All four Children's Laureates – Anne Fine, Michael Morpurgo, Michael Rosen and Jacqueline Wilson – have signed the "No To Age Banding" petition, so it's ironic that the draft guidelines produced by the Publishers' Association (PA) are illustrated with a copy of Wilson's *Jacky Daydream*, rated 9+. The choice reveals how useless age-banding is, as recent reading lists drawn up by experts rate *Jacky Daydream* as suitable for age 7-9 (a Canadian bookshop), 8-12 (Waterstone's) and 11+ (an Australian guide for school librarians).

The daft, sorry, draft guidelines also suggest that *Charlotte's Web* and *Pippi Longstocking* are suitable for 7+, but youngsters must wait until they are 9+ to read *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* or *Ballet Shoes*.

The PA's plans will see several major publishers of children's books add 5+, 7+, 9+, 11+ or 13+/teen labels to help gormless grown-ups shopping for birthday presents. They say that "many adults lack confidence when it comes to choosing which books to buy and may be drawn to some 'safer' age-ranged product such as a DVD or clothes". But the "No to Age Banding" statement calls the idea "ill-conceived" and says children may be put off reading books they might love, for fear of looking babyish. "It's also likely to encourage over-prescriptive or anxious adults to limit a child's reading in ways that are unnecessary and even damaging," they say.

"Depressing what boys consider an insult nowadays"

Philip Pullman and Alan Garner have won concessions from their publishers not to age band their books, but few authors have so much clout.

■ HAPPY news from Hutchinson. Following our item in the last *Eye*, the publisher says it will indeed be publishing a new Ruth Rendell novel this autumn: *Portobello*, which will be out in November.

'Bookworm'

MODESTY BLAZE

"I suppose in a way it is like asking someone who normally writes complex symphonic music if they would like to write a three-minute pop song."

– Sebastian Faulks on writing the new James Bond novel, the Times, *28 May*

Which living person do you most admire and why?
Nelson Mandela for his compassion, Richard Curtis for all his work on Comic Relief. And all the mothers out there – I admire every one of you.

What is your most treasured possession?
My daughter, although I don't own her – I am just her shepherd.

To whom would you most like to say sorry, and why?
To myself – for the years I was so hard and uptight. Let go and live, Geri!

GERI HALLIWELL,
Guardian Weekend

Pseuds Corner

'Almost half of all casualties of war are children. In the dusty streets of Iraq, I met four of them, Hama, Illsuv, Noel and Fahtama. I loved them and I knew I could do something.'

Soon after, Garnier selected Chantal as the spokesperson for its Garnier Nutrisse Cream brand of natural ingredient haircolour.

Interview with Canadian singer CHANTAL KREVIAZUK, Garnier promotional magazine

Dimitri Shostakovich was a follower of Zenit [St Petersburg] when they laboured in the lower reaches of Soviet football and the great composer would have taken symphonic inspiration from the playmaker's arrowed delivery through the heart of the Rangers defence.

BBC Sport on the UEFA Cup Final

Annie Lennox is sick and tired of being portrayed as a tragic waif, a woebegone woman whose tortured genius is driven by manic moods that can only find relief through expressing them with her voice and in her songs... [continues]

***Radio Times* Desert Island Discs preview**

What was the last green thing you did?
I try to buy recycled stuff. The other day, I bought a cushion made of vintage Chanel tweed. It's gorgeous.

LAUREN LAVERNE,
Guardian

CONTRIBUTORS: J. Blomfield, David Cobb, 'Diccon', Tudor Humphries, Charlotte Mackean,

£10 paid for all entries

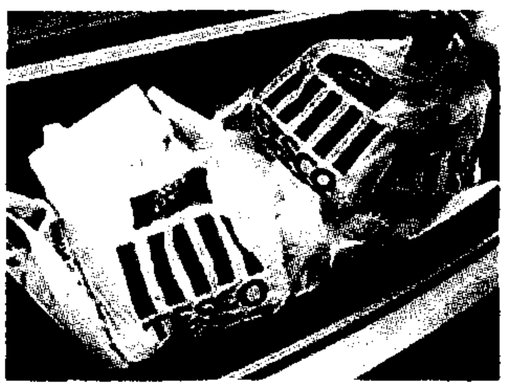
IN THE BACK

TESCO TAX AVOIDANCE

Duchy originals

THERE is no corner of tax haven Europe that Tesco won't visit if it will shave several millions of pounds off the grocer's tax bill. Last time it was the Swiss canton of Zug; this time the scheme uncovered by *Private Eye* takes in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

Eighteen months ago, Luxembourg companies register records show, Tesco implemented a plan to subvert British tax laws that prevent UK companies shifting their profits into "controlled foreign companies" located in tax havens. The 25-year-old legislation, which imposes tax on the profits of UK companies' tax haven subsidiaries, does, however, exempt certain operations, including holding companies as long as they aren't used to dump the organisation's profits in the tax haven. But Tesco found a way of doing exactly that while still benefiting from the exemption.



In October 2006 the firm set up four Luxembourg companies – Armitage, Cirrus, Cheshunt and Delamare – which immediately acquired Tesco's expanding operations in Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Ireland. The Luxembourg companies, it could easily be claimed, thus became holding companies and exempt from the tax avoidance laws. They then set about trousering some serious cash using a novel arrangement that kept it out of the taxman's grasp.

Using English law, Armitage and Cirrus established the "Armitage English Partnership", while Cheshunt and Delamare set up the "Delamare Partnership". £826m was injected into the Armitage partnership (less into Delamare) for lending to Tesco's legitimate business operations, generating a likely tax-free income of perhaps £50m a year (though the partnerships don't have to produce accounts).

At this point the Tesco tax planners had cause to thank the German First World War occupation of the Grand Duchy as, under company law enacted at the time, the profits run up in the partnerships that the companies formed are not considered the companies' profits. Under UK tax law, Tesco concluded, this meant the companies were still considered legitimate holding companies and thus exempt from the anti-tax avoidance rules.

HM Revenue and Customs doesn't agree. But, rather than leave the matter to the courts, chancellor Alistair Darling decided in this year's budget to "put beyond doubt" that the scheme won't work. The measure, announced his financial secretary Jane Kennedy last week, was "an important part of the UK's defences against tax avoidance".

So at last the government protects the British taxpayer from the ubiquitous grocer, whose spokesman declined to comment on the latest revelation.

ACTIS

False profits

HOW have the bosses who sold themselves the fund management arm of British overseas development fund CDC in 2004 for peanuts, and who now make millions every year from the firm known as Actis, got away with it for so long?

One reason is the depth of official ignorance over the privatisation. After the *Eye's* recent revelations of the tens of millions being trousered by Actis owners, led by senior partner Paul Fletcher, the department for international development (DfID) attempted a belated explanation of how Actis still didn't really make any money. "To date, the net distributable profit of Actis after staff remuneration has been zero," said a spokesman.

In fact the most recently reported profits were $19m. They are not reduced by "remuneration" but are simply carved up among the partners, giving them several hundreds of thousands of pounds each and more than £1m in Fletcher's case (not to mention the "carried interest" shares of profits on selling CDC's investments which run into the tens of millions).

The documents creating Actis even stated explicitly that these payments were *not* salaries, in the same way that profits shared among partners in big accountancy partnerships are not salaries. But by pretending they are, Actis's ballooning profits can be ignored and the whole rip-off presented as a reasonable commercial deal.

Not that DfID seems to care too much. The *Eye's* freedom of information request for details of the DfID board's deliberations on CDC and Actis elicited the response that the £3bn fund, by far DfID's largest asset and a significant privatisation, had *never* been discussed at the top level. Small wonder the suits have been able to pocket so many millions right under the government's nose.

OLYMPICS

Spoils sports

FORMER International Olympic Committee marketing director Michael Payne is a busy man. As well as working for Honav, the Chinese supplier of London 2012 souvenirs (see last *Eye*), the architect of the Olympic sponsorship and business partnership system is in demand from companies wanting to cash in on the games, present and future.

In a mini-biography supplied to the 2008 Sport Industry Awards, Payne reveals that he has also acted as strategic adviser on sports marketing and media rights to British Telecom, WPP, Volkswagen and Aigo.

In what was reportedly a hard-fought contest earlier this year, British Telecom beat Orange to the role of official telecomms partner for the 2012 games, estimated to be worth £80m in publicity.

Aigo is providing various hi-tech products for the Olympics in China and its subsidiary Aifly is the official service provider of language training for the 150,000 volunteers. It also recently became an official partner of the Olympic Museum in Lausanne.

Volkswagen, meanwhile, is the exclusive automobile partner for the 2008 Games, providing a fleet of 6,000 vehicles to the Beijing organising committee. And WPP subsidiary United recently announced proudly that it had won the contract for the "creative development and implementation of a global integrated marketing communications campaign" for the International Olympic Committee.

Meanwhile, London 2012 organisers defended the decision to buy pin badges from China rather than any of the large number of UK companies that bid for the work. "There will continue to be many opportunities for UK businesses of all sizes to bid for the estimated £6bn worth of Games-related contracts," they said. But how many of them can afford to hire the right adviser?

POLICE 5

Sharma mishtake, shurely?

THE Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) has been landed a tricky problem in the shape of Prem Pal Sharma, the man the Home Office appointed to sit on the police watchdog's selection panel for the next five years.

For 55-year-old Mr Sharma, from west London, is the same Mr Sharma who was fired four years ago from his job as a manager in Ealing borough council's housing and social services department for, among other things, bullying and using council resources inappropriately. Ideal qualifications for someone who will be interviewing and appointing police authority members!

In December 2004 Mr Sharma failed in his employment tribunal claim that his dismissal was the result of racial and sexual discrimination by Ealing council. After an 18-day hearing, the tribunal ruled in favour of Ealing, which claimed Mr Sharma had appointed staff to further his own political ambitions. The tribunal had been told that when staff refused to do personal work for him, he had threatened them with dismissal.

It also found that he had sworn and shouted at staff and belittled them in front of others with unfair criticism. "Workplace bullies", the council said after the hearing, would not be tolerated.

The MPA did not know about Mr Sharma's employment history until asked by the *Eye* about his appointment. The Home Office, which apparently appointed him two months ago, said it was "inappropriate to comment on the matter". However, it is known that it too was only recently made aware of concerns about Mr Sharma's background. Now it seems the two are at loggerheads over what to do about him. The Home Office said it was up to the MPA, if they had any concerns. Whereas the MPA said: "As the Home Office appointee to the five strong selection panel, he is the department's responsibility." Fortunately Mr Sharma, who could not be contacted, has not yet sat on any selections panels.

Pounding the beat

WILL the Metropolitan police never learn? Inspector Knacker of the Yard has just been ordered to pay Sergeant Gurpal Virdi another £70,400 compensation for once again being victimised by his bosses.

The Sikh police officer has already won a total of £240,000 in compensation after an employment tribunal found he had been unlawfully sacked after being fitted up by his west London colleagues for sending race hate mail to other ethnic minority officers (*Eyes passim ad nauseam*).

The second award comes after another tribunal found that Sgt Virdi had been wrongly denied promotion to inspector, despite a commendation from his unit commander, because of his previous discrimination action against the Met.

So is the Met paying out graciously this time? No. It has appealed against the ruling and the compensation award.

Meanwhile Sgt Virdi is about to embark on his third claim for victimisation. He claims that following the second ruling in his favour, he was ostracised by colleagues, got no support from line managers and was effectively forced out of his unit.

Furthermore, two months ago Virdi submitted a detailed report to Sir Ian Blair, the Met police commissioner, about Jim Bates, the computer expert who lied about his qualifications and was convicted of perjury and making false statements (*Eyes passim*). It was Bates whose dodgy "expert" evidence was used by Scotland Yard to bring the ridiculous race hate charges against Virdi. So far Sir Ian has not even acknowledged receipt of Virdi's report. No wonder he feels isolated.

In the Back continues overleaf ➤

BIWATER

A gentleman... and scholars

MORE on Adrian White CBE and Biwater, his Dorking-based private water company with a presence in 90 countries and a mission to "maintain a world class reputation in all our business activities, founded on the highest standards of customer service, ethics and environmental care".

Eye readers will already be familiar with the legal travails the company has had with Tanzania since 2005 when the government there expelled City Water, a Biwater-led consortium with a contract to run water services in Dar Es Salaam, the east African country's biggest city, for not performing (see *Eyes* 1135, 1148 & 1202).

But on the other side of Africa, in Ghana, the dealings of Biwater chairman White with former president Jerry Rawlings suggest the company's approach to "customer service" can be seen in a far more generous light.

In the late 1990s the World Bank and other donors urged the west African nation to bring in international companies to manage its water supply. The process was slow but Biwater was one of the main bidders.

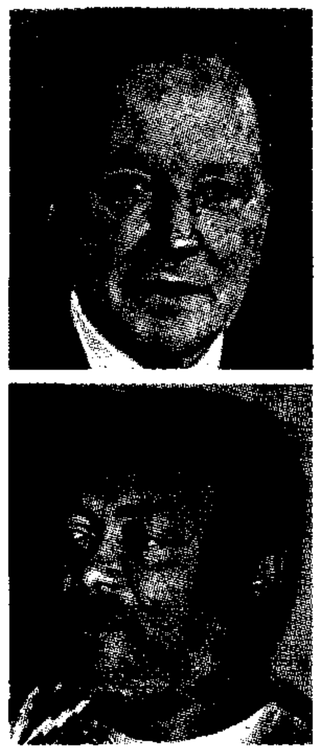
Then in 2000, two teenaged children of Ghana's then President Rawlings, the former coup leader, were enrolled at short notice at £7,000-a-term Millfield public school in Dorset. Their fees were settled as scholarships funded by Biwater, Mr White acting as the children's guardian. The arrangement apparently presented no problem for the school, whose board of governors was chaired by Mr White.

This display of generosity from the water company chairman to the then African president was of course unrelated to the looming award of a lucrative privatisation contract: Mr White describes himself as a Rawlings family friend.

Moreover, President Rawlings abided by Ghana's constitution and stood down after two terms in 2001, before the water privatisation tender process was even completed. When his designated successor was soundly defeated at the polls, Rawlings the family friend and now ex-president was left with no remaining influence in Ghana's government.

■ UNRELATED FACT: A year later, Mr White's office tried to drop the scholarship. In 2003, Mike Coombs, Biwater's finance director, formally ended the arrangement – something Mr White had apparently omitted to mention either to the school or to his family friends in Ghana.

■ ANOTHER UNRELATED FACT: In 2005 Biwater then withdrew from the privatisation tender and settled for a modest water treatment project in northern Ghana – as in Tanzania the conclusion of another episode in the company's "proud and successful record in Africa".



Family friends: White and Rawlings

A spokesman for Biwater told the *Eye* that its corporate communications team didn't have time to respond to the *Eye*'s questions about Biwater's little-known Millfield "scholarship".

PRISON EDUCATION

Alas, OLASS

THE private firm running education schemes at more than 30 jails announced that it is to abandon all training at prisons in Kent and is begging for more cash from education bosses.

A4e took over the Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) at the eight prisons in Kent in 2006 in a three-year deal. But it now claims it is in line for £892,000 losses on the contract and so will be unable to run the scheme next year. Despite having won the contract through competitive tender, the company has gone cap in hand to the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) seeking financial help.

OLASS is supposed to offer vocational and skills training for offenders "to gain the skills and qualifications they need to hold down a job and have a positive role in society". The contracts were carved up by region, with some regions opting to use further education colleges and others to farm the work out to private firms.

The *Eye* understands that talks with the LSC are continuing, but prison education staff will not be sorry to see the back of A4e. The company got off to a bad start in 2006 when teachers who were automatically transferred to it discovered their pensions had shrunk. A4e later agreed to match their old pensions; but Sally Hunt, of the UCU staff union, said: "Running high-quality prison education and training with professional staff does not come cheap, as A4e has found out."

PS: Within days of announcing that it was pulling the plug on Kent, A4e won a new £1.6m contract with New Deal for Disabled People in Glasgow, providing career skills training for disabled Scots. Nothing succeeds like failure, eh?

BIG BROTHER

Back to databasics

A HIGHLY controversial database which threatens people's reputations and renders them unemployable has received surprisingly little publicity, given that it is susceptible to abuse and flies in the face of the "innocent until proven guilty" basis of our justice system.

Some major employers are paying for and about to contribute to an online database of staff who have been *accused* but not necessarily convicted of workplace theft, dishonesty, forgery, fraud or damaging company property. It is called the National Staff Dismissal Register and is run by the Action Against Business Crime (AABC) – originally a Home Office and British Retail Consortium partnership.

Never mind if there is not enough evidence to mount a criminal prosecution, workers who have been sacked over allegations could be listed – even if they deny the charges. And anyone who chooses to leave his or her job "while under suspicion" could also end up on the register.

The *Eye* fired off a series of questions about the integrity of the database to Michael Schuck, chief executive of AABC. He replied that it had been set up with the agreement of the Information Commissioner's Office and fully complied with data protection laws. Thus the boss should inform the employee that he or she will be put on the register and then the employee can access the data and correct any false information. This neatly reverses the innocent until proven guilty principle, because the onus is then on the employee to prove the information wrong.

But what happens when there is a complete contradiction? What standard of proof is required, when the normal safeguard of having evidence tested in court has been bypassed? If someone has committed a criminal offence, why not bring them to trial, meaning their details are properly stored at the criminal records bureau?

Mr Schuck, a former police officer, said sometimes firms wanted to short-circuit the lengthy criminal justice system, which could take six or nine months. "Sometimes they decided a prosecution was not always appropriate, and do not want to give someone a criminal record," he said.

Except… they are happy to effectively brand someone a criminal on their own database anyway without the same standard of proof?

"It is not for ever. The data must be reviewed by the firm that submitted it every year," he said.

"You are *Private Eye*. You are going to kick shit at me anyway, saying this is some Orwellian secret blacklist, which it is not," he added. So which companies have signed up to the register? "I am not prepared to tell you at this stage." Sounds like some Orwellian secret blacklist, then.

At least the Home Office appears to be distancing itself from the scheme. It says it stopped funding AABC last year and the database is a commercial scheme over which it was not consulted and had no involvement.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

£1bn Worth of working time lost to British people due to late running trains in a year.

£1m Total pay-packet of Iain Coucher, CEO of Network Rail, in a year.

SOCIAL HOUSING

Form a queue

MEDIA hysteria over falling house prices might lead a Martian to conclude Britain has no social rented housing. But despite the introduction of "right-to-buy" (RTB) in 1980, after the Netherlands the UK has the second largest social housing sector in the world.

Before RTB 30 percent of households lived in social housing; today it is 18 percent. But with home-owners struggling to pay their mortgages and repossessions rising, demand for social housing has never been greater. The Department of Communities and Local Government estimates a further 1m households will register for a council or housing association property by 2010 (on top of the 4m already waiting).

However, the sector faces a serious crisis caused by changes in the way housing associations, which manage 1.6m properties (40 percent of the total social housing stock), are funded.

Since Labour came to power in 1997, they have been forced to sell properties to pay for repairs, admin, wages and new building as central government funds have been cut off. In 2006/07 housing associations raised £542m from sales, helping the sector achieve a pre-tax surplus of £270m.

Without such sales many associations would already have gone to the wall. But relying on property sales in a falling market leaves many facing an uncertain future, particularly larger associations with 10,000 or more homes. In 2005 sales profits accounted for just 38 percent of pre-tax surpluses. In 2007, it was more than the total surplus at 103 percent. Which is bad news if you are on a housing waiting list.

In December the Ujima housing association became the first HA to go bust. It had a £1bn portfolio, employed 150 staff, managed 5,000 homes and was £13m in the red, despite having received £47m in 2006 from the national affordable housing programme administered by the Housing Corporation.

In the City

THE Bradford & Bingley crisis encapsulates what went wrong in the UK mortgage business and its regulation as the housing bubble inflated towards a bigger bang after 2000 – the year B&B belatedly switched from fuddy-duddy mutual building society to "go-go" bank.

That crisis was also inextricably linked to the aggressive, if not predatory, sub-prime mortgage policies imported by American lenders through B&B's fateful alliance with GMAC-RFC, the biggest UK player in making loans which were then sold on, the securitisation game which spread the toxic sub-prime mortgage virus. Purchasing GMAC sub-prime loans was a significant driver in B&B's dash for growth.

In 2006 the Fundamentally Supine Authority awoke to the explosion in sub-prime lending on the US model, and carried out a review of 4,000 GMAC loans secured on homes. This revealed that 92 percent were self-certified and had undergone no verification of the borrower's income, and of the balance, only 4 percent had been subjected to a "full-status" risk-based income assessment.

"It's not really as much fun with everybody keeping all their money in the bank and not buying any property"

However, the FSA appeared unconcerned about what this might mean for B&B, which since 2002 had been buying GMAC loans big-time. In the same way it remained unconcerned until too late about the Northern Wreck business model which relied on wholesale money markets.

That year the FSA also carried out an in-depth risk assessment of GMAC-RFC which raised some concerns about its lending policies (*Eye* 1207). But any doubts may have been mitigated by the fact that GMAC-RFC was ultimately owned by Detroit auto giant General Motors, which has since sold control of the GMAC financial services group to a consortium led by private equity house Cerberus Capital. Like B&B shareholders, investors in GMAC are now counting big losses.

The GMAC lending model targeted more what Americans call "Alt-A" borrowers rather than the seriously bad risks. It relied on credit scores and a "propensity to pay" history plus a higher than normal "loan to value" margin of at least 10-15 percent. This model, GMAC maintained, ensured that defaults would be minimised and profits maximised while leaving ample equity as security.

It was a very profitable model, especially if borrowers fell into arrears. Resulting fees and higher interest charges made already lucrative loans even more mouth-wateringly profitable.

GMAC stormed up the UK lending charts to become the tenth biggest mortgage lender by volume. It concentrated through a broker network on self-certified loans and the booming buy-to-let market – a market B&B was also keen to dominate.

But the model contained a fundamental flaw: the assumption of ever-rising house prices. The idea was that if the borrowers had to go then the lender would still be left – after sucking out all their money via interest, fees and other charges – with a property which could be sold at a profit (which is why critics refer to this as the "vampire model"!)

But once house prices started falling – and the falls are steeper in areas favoured by sub-prime lenders – then the lenders and those like B&B who bought their loans (not just from GMAC but from other sub-prime lenders such as Kensington) were in deep trouble.

How unsurprising, then, that the B&B announcement last week of its shock £8m loss and deep-discount, repriced £250m rights issue revealed problems on the ex-GMAC loans. These are performing almost three times as badly as its own originated mortgages – arrears at 5 percent against 1.87 percent. Acquired self-certified loans running three months or more in arrears had jumped from 3 percent at the end of December to 4.3 percent at the end of April. With buy-to-let loans, the figure had soared from 2.1 percent to 3.5 percent – and this is after just four months of what is likely to be a year or more of increasing pain in the housing market. Those figures are likely to get much worse.

B&B admitted that at least £15m of its losses were due to fraud; City analysts believe that figure could be at least £40m. Self-certification lies at the heart of mortgage fraud – along with crooked brokers and greedy lenders. Ironically the frauds are easier to spot – payments stop almost as soon as they are due to begin. But problems with "vampire loans" take much longer to materialise.

B&B and GMAC were clearly made for each other. B&B, as a late starter, wanted to play catch-up and grow quickly, while GMAC was eager to oblige as it had a ready buyer financing ever bigger lending. In 2006 its loans grew by 75 percent to over £12bn.

The original deal was struck in September 2002 by the then B&B chief executive Christopher Rodrigues – B&B paid £650m for 6,000 mortgage loans. At that time the emphasis was on buy-to-let, which provided a third of the 6,000. A fifth were self-certified, and the near 50 percent balance were standard mortgages. The average loan size was £109,000.

B&B insisted that GMAC had a "similar risk profile" to its own and that, furthermore, it had "further tested the loan book using its own credit scoring process to confirm that it meets the group's credit standards". This mantra was to be repeated every time GMAC unloaded a new loan book on B&B.

Observers believe B&B was well aware of the high risks and inadequacies presented by GMAC's "Alt-A" model but went along because it was a shortcut to growth and generated fat profits.

At that stage GMAC, the number one sub-prime lender in its own words, was only 14th in the lending charts. The deal with B&B would enable it to raise the funding to more than double its market share.

In March 2003, B&B bought another 3,900 GMAC mortgages for £470m, but by then 56 percent were self-certified and 22 percent buy-to-let. The average loan was also higher, at £120,000.

Then, in April 2003, B&B announced it was to take up to £1.05bn-worth of GMAC loans during that year. Of the first tranche of £260m, 48 percent were self-certified. In fact, B&B only acquired loans worth £851m under the deal.

On top of the £1bn deal, in October 2003 B&B paid £106m for a book of anything but prime GMAC loans. This package "intentionally includes customers with lower credit characteristics than previous portfolios". It did not say if these were self-certified but they almost certainly were. The loans averaged £89,000.

In December 2003 Rodrigues announced another deal with GMAC – this time to buy up to £1.4bn-worth of loans during 2004 – and he played down talk of higher credit risks. Meanwhile, the GMAC loan books were helping B&B to grow faster than it could have done internally, and with loans which offered higher returns.

During 2004, B&B bought loans worth £1.12bn from GMAC; these were increasingly more self-certified than buy-to-let. The last £407m tranche in November was 51 percent that way on an average loan of £133,000.

In January 2005, B&B agreed to buy up to £1.4bn-worth of loans from GMAC. In fact this third deal only totaled £1.1bn, but the pattern was set – the loans were always heavily biased towards self-certification rather than buy-to-let. Loan-to-value ratios left a 25-30 percent margin.

A fourth GMAC deal, again for up to £1.4bn, was announced in January 2006. By then B&B had paid GMAC £4.3bn to take sub-prime loans off its books. During 2006, in fact, B&B paid more than £2.3bn to GMAC for loans. The largest tranche, in April for £729m, was 63 percent self-certified on an average loan of £142,000. But after this the bank no longer gave a breakdown of the type of loans; instead it repeated that it had reviewed GMAC's lending policies and tested the loan book! Given the bank's poor internal controls, what did they know? It is these loans which are now said to be causing B&B most of its problems. Sub-prime loans usually run from two to four years.

In December 2006, as the housing market seriously overheated and the sub-prime problems began to emerge in the US, B&B still could not get enough GMAC loans. It agreed to take up to £4bn a year from the American lender for each of the next three years "to cement the long-term future of this excellent business relationship". B&B was now GMAC's biggest client.

B&B spent over £2.4bn before the sub-prime bomb exploded last summer; the last deal, on 31 August, was the biggest at £1.1bn. Since then B&B has been licking its wounds and restricting its purchases from GMAC. Last week it announced: "Arrears in more recently acquired mortgages from GMAC have been higher than anticipated. We have already cut back our purchases to the minimum commitment under our contract." This is still believed to be £350m a quarter until 2009. B&B has bought loans worth almost £9bn from GMAC – around £5bn since 2006 alone.

GMAC insists it carried out "thorough due diligence" on the loans it sold. But the FSA sample test raises serious questions about just what that means.

The securitisation market is now closed to GMAC-RFC, forcing it to hold more loans on its books. The GMAC mortgage financing arm, Residential Capital, disclosed that at December

☛ *See over...*

THE DIRECTORS
DREDGE & RIGG
YOU'RE INCENTIVISING ME TO TAKE RECKLESS GAMBLES? ISN'T THAT RISKY.'
NOT AT ALL!
YOU'RE ONLY RISKING THE COMPANY— YOUR MONEY'S SAFE, DON'T WORRY!
SLAP!
269.

"Thank you for your enquiry. This is an automated response"

2007 it held more UK loans on its books than anywhere other than in California, where house prices have really collapsed. GMAC-RFC has yet to file its 2007 accounts, although ResCap filed its group accounts in February. In the three months to the end of March, the number of its UK loans evaporated from just under 18,000 worth $4.5bn in the same quarter of 2007 to just 2,648 worth $707m. Some observers believe GMAC–RFC may even exit the UK market as an active lender. GMAC last week agreed a rescue financing package to save ResCap from bankruptcy due to its inability to make asset sales such as those fed to B&B.

B&B rescuers Texas Pacific Group, another US private equity player, will be looking closely at that ex-GMAC loan book as it hopes to see the bank deal its way out of a large hole. Which means – under the terms of the vampire model – looking to evict those sub-prime borrowers who cannot repay. But with house prices falling, this may no longer guarantee the profits previously anticipated. The question will be whether repossession will still be the option chosen for these neutron loans.

PLANET FOOTBALL

Arsenal

WITH Russian oligarch Alisher Usmanov camped on his doorstep, Arsenal chairman Peter Hill-Wood no doubt now regrets snootily declaring last year: "We do not want his sort", referring to the arrival of another large shareholder in the shape of American Stan Kroenke.

No similar sentiment was expressed about Arsenal's newest business partner, Nigeria's United Bank for Africa. Last month the Premier League club announced a "strategic partnership" with UBA involving financial services and grassroots football initiatives.

UBA needed some good news. Just in April it was fined $15m by the US Treasury for "pervasive and systemic" failures of banking and anti-money laundering regulations and the continued failure to identify and report suspicious activities at its New York branch involving $197m. UBA breached a previous cease-and-desist order issued by the Treasury, which said the bank had shown a reckless disregard for its obligations.

This was the second time the New York branch of UBA had been in trouble. In July last year it avoided prosecution over allegations that it had obstructed a money-laundering investigation. The proceeds of that old Nigerian con – the email offering untold illegal riches in return for use of your bank account – had been passing through accounts at UBA. The bank forfeited $5.3m. It was also fined $700,000 by the Nigerian central bank.

Back in Nigeria, UBA accounts have also featured in investigations by the Economic & Financial Crimes Commission in the past two years, such as those into former Delta state governor James Ibori, Abia state governor Orji Kalu and Zamfara state governor Ahmed Sani Yerima and other officials. But then what has that got to do with football?

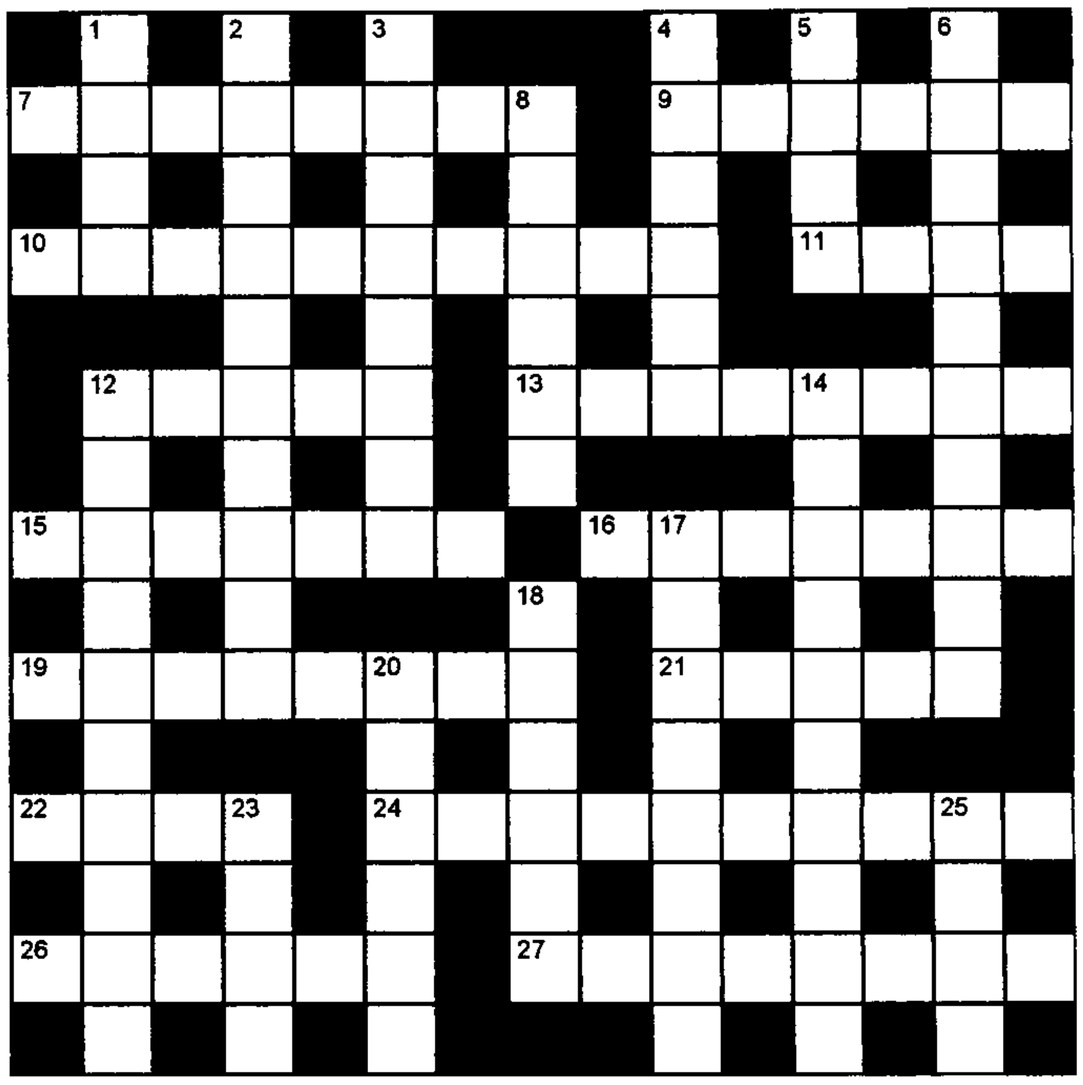
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 367

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 20 June 2008

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

7 Dicky gets into Stephen's (so it's said) girly underwear (8)

9 Selling back, er, US women as sex objects (6)

10 Buddhist-like Blair endlessly returning to secure Brown's end (love-in unlikely) (3-7)

11/23 Rock theme far out? Loud rubbish! (4,4)

12/13 Do toil madly to appear in tabloid images – a favourite activity at Westminster (5,8)

15 Film star mainly gets screwed without resistance (7)

16 Put on one's back in Strand in no uncertain manner (7)

19 Arse extricating Labour's leader from fall from grace (8)

21 Top taken off Dirty Rosy (5)

22/25 TV series made by shits backing white South African movement? (4,4)

24 From which briefs get more than adequate support? (5,5)

26 Snide Poles unsettled (6)

27 Spin exponent likely to get fired? (8)

DOWN

1 Go beserk with back to front threesome! (4)

2 Smart arse member behind Conservative bar (6,4)

3 Sexist vibrating gismo? Yes ... no ... yes (8)

4 Blunt's hollow intervening in party backing (6)

5 Prison unrest (4)

6 Cliff: "Duty everywhere engulfs one" – pain in the arse! (10)

8 Tensing possibly audible when Brenda in mad pash embrace (6)

12 Being a luvvy, quiet shag with Bill – ding-a-ling! (4-6)

14 It could mean the earth in Sun circulation terms, much of Asia? (5,5)

17 It's sort of lovely, arresting way too zealous a supporter of Blair! (4,4)

18 Church official against getting changed for male union (6)

20 Beds craftily, in a sly movement (6)

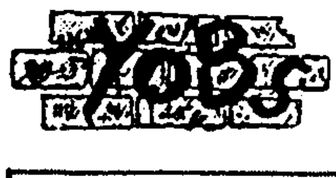
23 See 11ac.

25 See 22ac.

Crossword 366 winner: LINDA ENGLISH

ACROSS: 1 Bush baby 5 Fetish 11 Re-elected 12 Rutland 14 Placebo 15 Gagging for it 18 Glue sniffing 21 Organic 23 Tangier 24 Skew-whiff 26 Irony 27 Sepoys 28 Eyeliner.

DOWN: 1 Bicarb 2 Snotty 3 Betrayals 4/25 Barfly 6 Enema 7 In theory 8 Hideout 9 Keeping fit 13 Dog biscuit 16/10 Financial clout 17 Dung-heap 18 Grouses 19 Disown 20 Prayer 22 Newly.



HUSBAND

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Which is absolute bollocks!
.. 'cause all 4 of us 'ave got one

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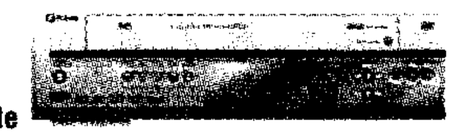

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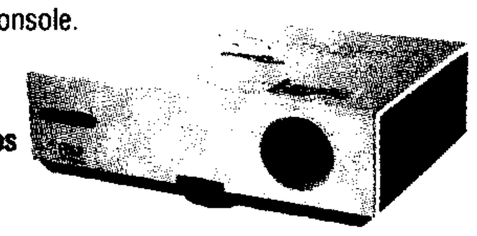

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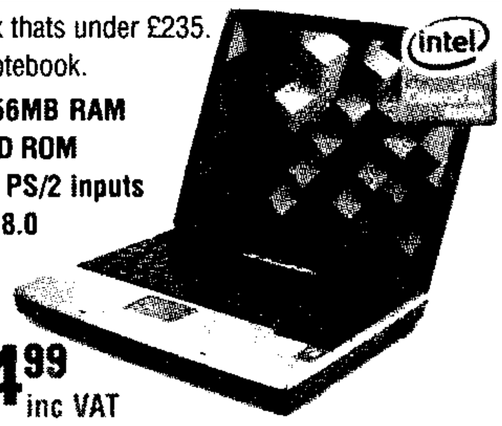

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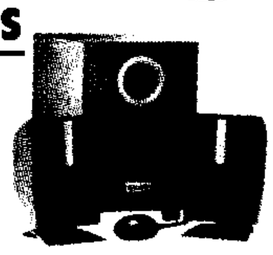

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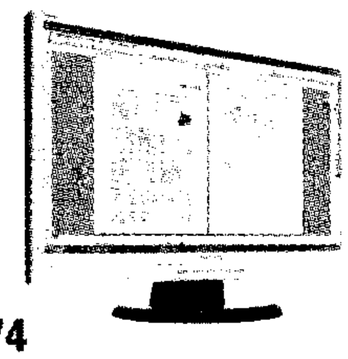

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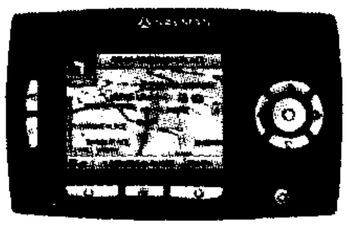

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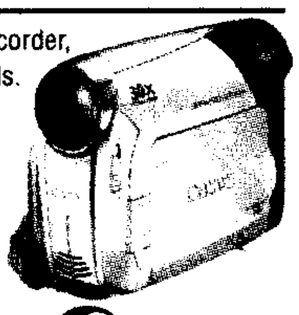

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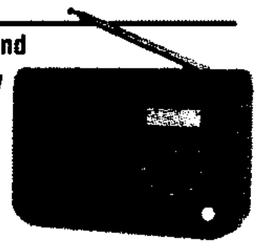
PURE DIGITAL ONE - BLACK



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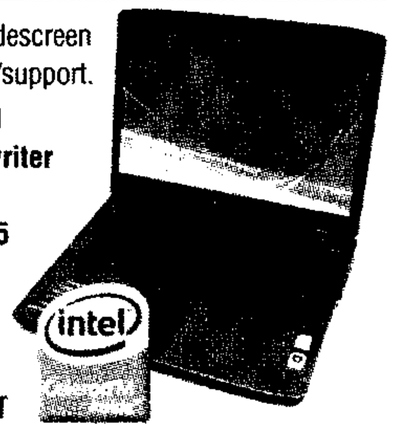

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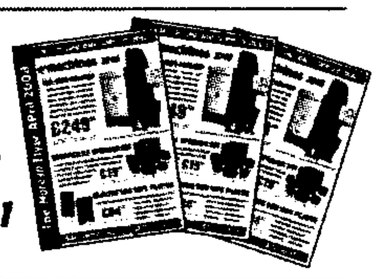

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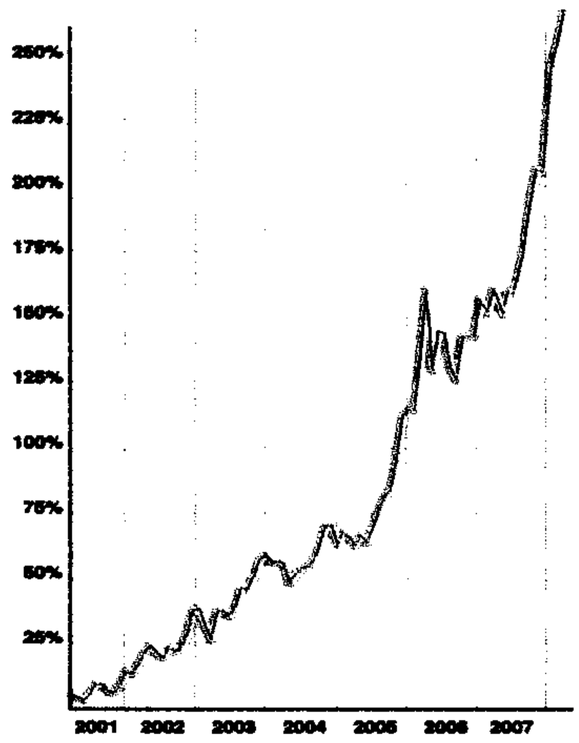

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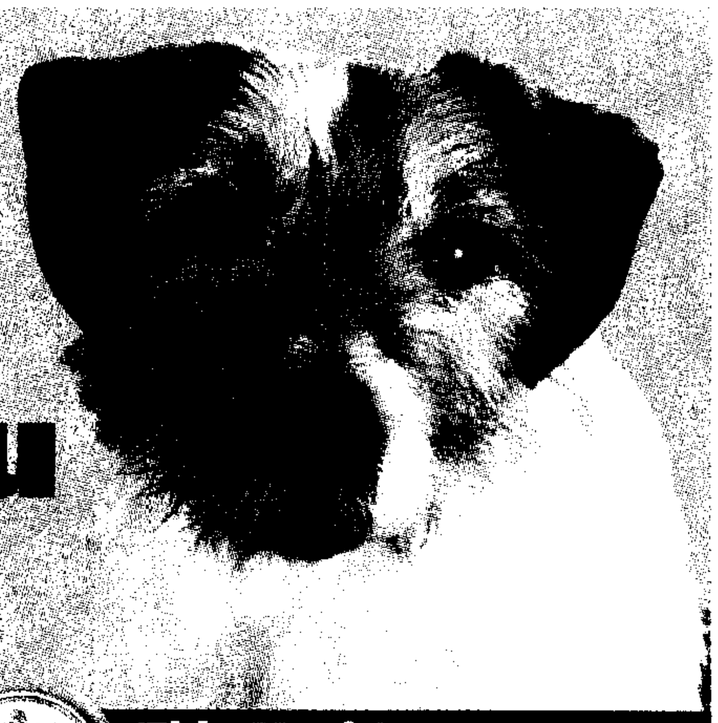

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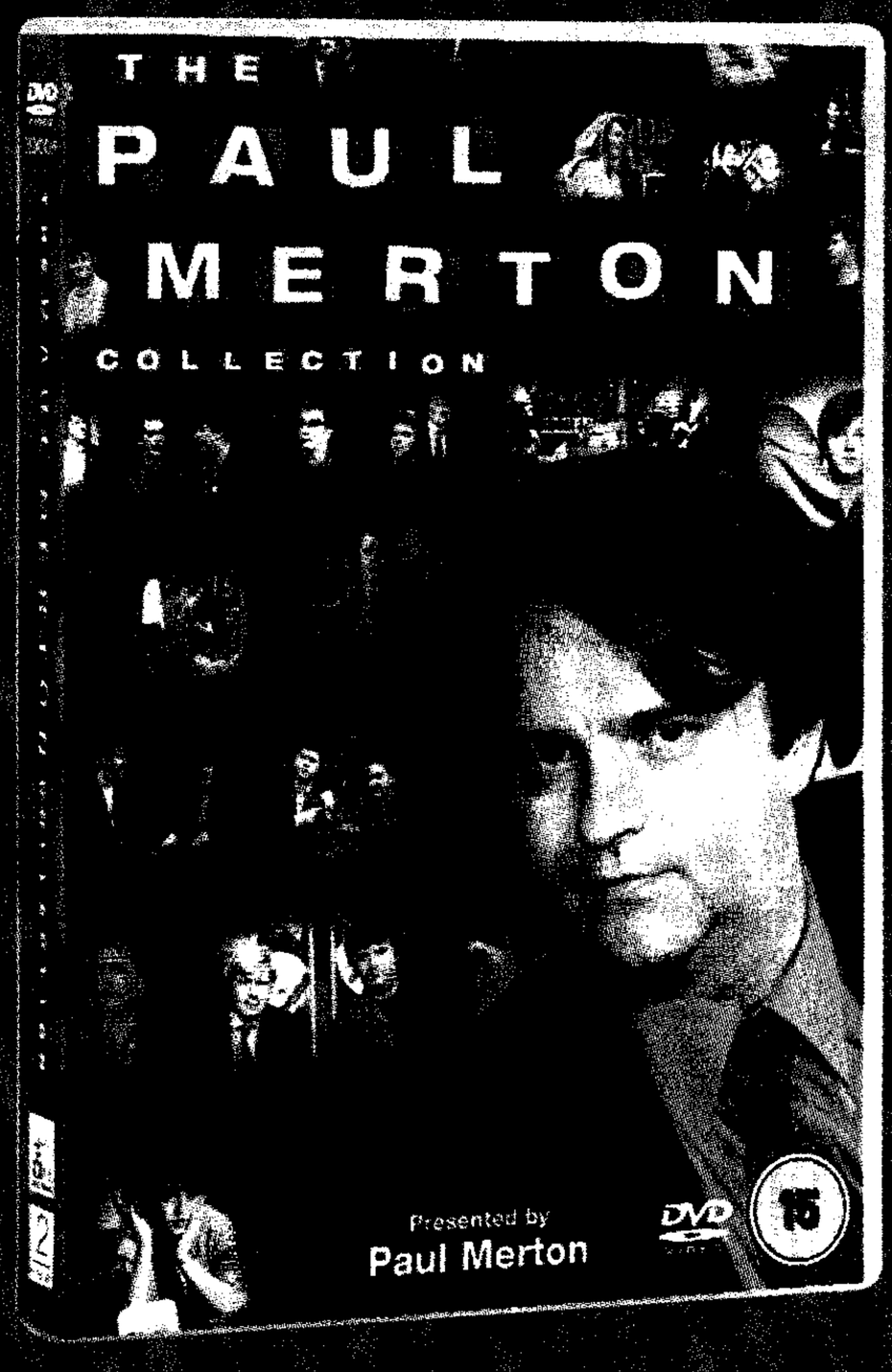

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MATURE MAN wishes to retrain as therapist to establish a new life; requires £20K for studies, support. Donors will be acknowledged with discounted therapy. Abbey, S/C: 09-01-26. A/C: 65385954. Email: newlifebegins48@yahoo.co.uk to get disc treatments.

SAFAD charity needs £25,000 to continue humanitarian work, please help. S/C: 60-01-16. A/C: 45022321 or e-mail safad@cranfield.ac.uk

SURVIVING another employment kick-in-teeth (local government just CUT husband's salary!). Deeply appreciate small share of philanthropic benefactor's fortune to support career change. Huge thanks! S/C: 07-01-16. A/C: 09072393.

AFTERMATH OF BONE MARROW TRANSPLANT has had devastating impact on job / income. Desperate. Barclays, S/C: 20-74-81. A/C: 03611752.

GRADUATE NEEDS 16K for studies in conflict resolution / development. Anything appreciated. S/C: 01-05-75. A/C: 43836593.

SMALL MIDDLE SCHOOL in rural mid-Cheshire. Do you feel that every child's development path is unique? Do you think schools can be small scale, conservation focused and rurally sustainable? We are looking to set up such a school. More information and all donations gratefully received: Classcalm, P.O. Box 343, Tarporley CW6 6AD.

PLEASE HELP. Need £25K to relocate and reunite loving family. Anything will help. Barclays, S/C: 20-68-10. A/C: 50382558.

ALZHEIMERS CHARITY CYCLE RUN: man, woman and child team undertaking 6-day cycle tour of Hebrides for awareness, any donation gratefully accepted. S/C: 93-86-29. A/C: 05872025.

PLEASE HELP US TO RAISE FUNDS for needy children of the UK go to summer camp. Thank you. S/C: 40-09-25. A/C: 51545485.

PLEASE HELP TSUNAMI SURVIVOR cover £850 travel costs for 4th anniversary visit, many thanks. S/C: 30-99-71. A/C: 01077400.

KARMA, help me help yourself. Donations – Nationwide, S/C: 07-01-16. A/C: 09089113. Alternatively, reply to Box number 247013. Thanks!

OPTIMISTIC SOCIOLOGIST offered Oxford University place, please help with fees. Bank of Scotland, S/C: 80-08-09. A/C: 00595873.

MY LAST HOPE. Tired carer, Please help me. 50K in debt. Desperate. Lloyds TSB, S/C: 77-71-05. A/C: 15183868.

HELP ME HELP MY PARENTS: Approaching their 70s, worked hard all their lives and still can't retire. Please help me pay off their mortgage so they don't have to sell up and move away. NatWest, S/C: 60-02-05. A/C: 23779012. Email: help.me.help.my.parents@googlemail.com

£30K NEEDED TO REPAY DEBT after year-long illness and resume postgrad study. Barclays, S/C: 20-97-58. A/C: 80592331. Thank you.

OVERDRAWN. NOT TOLD FAMILY. Help me out? First Direct, S/C: 40-47-73. A/C: 61028030.

SOLICITOR NEEDED to sue Virgin Atlantic for failure to comply with EU261/2004. Teacher – limited funds. virginlies@fsmail.net

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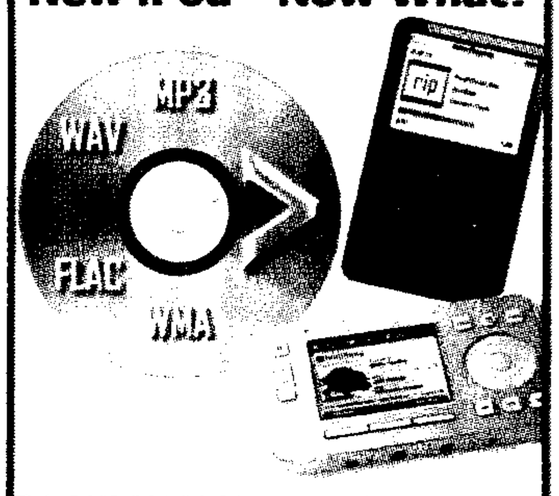

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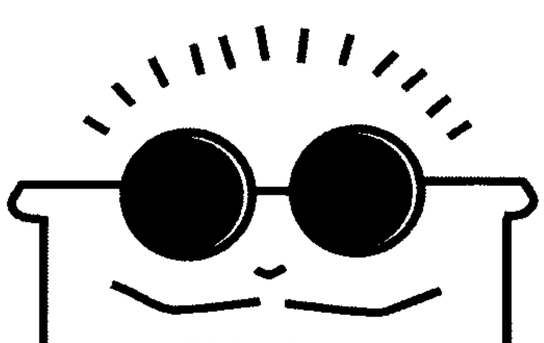

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